Japan commits more aid for a peaceful Mindanao

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MARATHON CHAMP

Ayan Bunsuay proudly carries the Philippine tricolor during his victory lap after winning the gold medal in the men's marathon race at the 22nd Southeast Asian Games in Hanoi on Friday. His winning time was 2 hours, 21 minutes and 3 seconds. (See story on Page A12.)

WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Single-fare scheme for LRT scrapped**
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- **Blasts rock US compound in Baghdad**
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  NEWS/A2

FPJ takes stand vs globalization

'Ka Ronnie' gives UP forum glimpse of platform

By Norman Bordadora

HE CAME too early for the forum. He saw. He left before it started.

Presidential bet Fernando Poe Jr. yesterday surprised militant farmers and fisherfolk when he showed up at a forum on globalization in the UP Diliman campus.

The organizers, who had been expecting only Poe spokesperson Sen. Vicente Sotto III, ended up being charmed by the movie actor, whose real name is Ronald Allan Poe. They even gave him a new nickname: Ka Ronnie.

In the impromptu half-hour meeting with the militant leaders, Poe also gave a glimpse of what could be his first known political position—an adventurous stance against globalization and trade liberalization that gave the groups something to look forward to.

"I heard him tell Ka Parag (Rafael Mariano, chair of the militant Magbubukid ng Pilipinas) that with regard to agriculture, the country should not participate in trade liberalization until it is prepared to compete," Sotto said.

Mariano could not recall what Sotto told the topnotch, adding that the opposition candidate gave "strong signals" that he was against the march to liberalization of the agricultural sector unless enough measures were taken to enable the country to compete respectably.

"So, he told us of that position against globalization and trade liberalization when we told him about the need to make agriculture the foundation of our country's economy," Mariano said in an interview.

The election-related forum was organized by the KMB the fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas and the labor group Anakpawis.

The exchange between Poe and the militant

PEASANTS' PICK: Presidential aspirant Fernando Poe Jr. arrives for consultations with peasant leaders Rafael Mariano and Dante Ramos at the UP campus in Diliman. At least, his friend, Sen. Vicente Sotto (left) is not content to wait for the actor's position.

De Castro bid tackled in secret London meet

By Michael Lim Ubac and Norman Bordadora

IS THE Senate's Wednesday Group working behind the scenes to get the presidential run of Sen. Nikolas Castro going?

De Castro, popularly known as "Kabayan," was the subject of a secret meeting on Dec. 11 between Sen. Juliet Arroyo, the perceived leader of the group, and Philippine Ambassador to the Court of St. James Edgardo D. Espiritu in London.

An unimpeachable source told the Inquirer that the Arroyo-Espiritu meeting discussed the candidacy of De Castro, a member of the Wednesday Group.

The secret meeting came on the heels of an exclusive news report published by the Inquirer that said De Castro had asked Espiritu last month if the latter would support him if he ran for president.

Although De Castro has still to declare his availability for the presidency or the vice presidency, Espiritu told the Inquirer in a telephone interview last Wednesday he would not be surprised if the Ati-Clin star broadcaster would do so.

Espiritu, the Senate secretary during the Estrada administration,

'Aventajado haggling for ransom cut on tape'

By Armand N. Nicozo and Arlyn dela Cruz
Court Tutor

THE NEGOTIATIONS for the release of the Sipadan hostages were solely recorded in a micro digital voice recorder, according to a Malaysian who also served as a negotiator.

And a relative of Leyang Ves's, then President Joseph Estrada's economic adviser for Mindanao, is threatening to make public the tape that supposedly shows chief negotiator Robert Aventajado bargaining for his cut of the P25-million ransom provided by the Malaysian government for the release of nine of its nationals.

The nine were among the 21 people abducted by the Abu Sayyaf from the Sipadan resort in Sabah in April 2000.

Yusuf Hamden, a Malaysian who served as negotiator for the nine Malaysians, told the Inquirer in a phone interview that the "very telling" tape would complete the story of what actually took place during the negotiations.

"I have a copy of the voice recording, and other people in the Philippines also have a copy" Hamden said, adding that the copies were in the possession of key Estrada officials and of a lawmaker.

"I was him (Aventajado) who initiated the violation of the no-ransom policy by asking money from Malaysia," Hamden said.

Aventajado had earlier accused Vice of admitting P1 million for the release of a Malaysian hostage but getting reimbursed for P2 million. He made the same accusation in his recently launched book, "140 Days of Terror: In the Clutches of the Abu Sayyaf."

Vice is keeping mum on the matter,

Some gov't workers have all the luck

By Armand Nicozo

SOME GRAFTERS in government appear to be luckier than most Filipinos. But is it really luck or plain deviousness?

While ordinary folk could only dream of winning the lottery, several officials at the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Bureau of Customs are claiming to have won huge amounts in lotteries and raffles.

But graft investigators are not buying their stories. In fact, they see a pattern in these supposedly lucky streaks.

Customs exceeds goal; eyes record

By Clarissa Batino

HERE'S GOOD news from the Bureau of Customs. The government's second biggest revenue earner exceeded its full year collection goal of P100.036 billion last Wednesday.

Now it's aiming to break the bureau's all-time collection record: P104.566 billion, which the agency posted in 1998.

Customs Commissioner Antonio Bernardo said the bureau needed only to raise P4.301 billion in the remaining days of the year to beat the all-time high.

"We still have 11 collection days to go. We hope we can maintain the surplus level until year-end," Bernardo said.

The agency collected P100.205 billion as of Dec. 10.

The BoC's performance will help the government keep its budget deficit on target.

The government, Asia's largest sovereign debt issuer outside Japan, has said it is confident of meeting its closely watched budget deficit goal this year as it reins in spending.

BIG CHIEF: Oscar Solis, Stephen of a flock of the nation in Los Angeles.

Vatican names Novo Ecijano first Fil-Am bishop in US

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE UNITED STATES' first Filipino-American Catholic bishop will help oversee the archdiocese of Los Angeles, one of the largest US Catholic communities with about five million members, the Vatican announced Thursday.

Bishop Oscar Solis, 52, is currently pastor of the St. Joseph Co-Cathedral Thibodaux in Louisiana. He was born and raised in San Juan, Nueva Ecija.

Solis' official enthronement by Cardinal Roger Mahony is scheduled on Feb. 10 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels in downtown Los Angeles.

Recently inaugurated, the cathedral is now an awesome landmark of architectural beauty. Los Salonga is getting married there next month.

Solis will be among the five auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese, home to diverse cultures and host to Sunday Masses held in 42 languages.

"The Filipino community here is very, very proud. We're very happy. It's about time the United States recognized the presence of Filipinos in the country," Fr. Jeremias Andres told the Inquirer yesterday in a phone interview from Los Angeles.

The United States is home to around 2.5 million Filipino workers and migrants.

Japan vows more aid after gov't peace pact with MILF

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

TOKYO, Japan (via PLDT)—The world's second biggest economy will commit more funds to Mindanao once the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) lays down its arms and strikes a peace accord with the Philippine government, Ambassador to Japan Domingo Siazon said yesterday.

"If we have a successful peace agreement with the MILF, the Japanese government is prepared to come in and support a similar process as they are trying to do in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iraq. This is a clear message to all of those that would like to separate from the republic that it is better to be one Filipino nation instead of fighting."

On the same day, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation released $19.8 million for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The JBIC money will be used to finance small-scale industries and build social infrastructure in one of the country's poorest regions.

If the peace talks are successful, government officials said they expect more aid from Japan to pour into the region, in the same way the United States is committed to pump in $200 million into Southern Mindanao and the World Bank $40 million in loans.

But aside from providing direct financing to Mindanao, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has also expressed interest in giving special emphasis to the Brunei to

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

PNP revamp: Berroya is last man standing

By Christine F. Figueroa

THE CONTROVERSIAL top-to-bottom revamp at the Philippine National Police is almost completed with 13 police officials moving to their new assignments effective last Tuesday.

But Chief Supt. Reynaldo Berroya remains at his old post as director of the Civil Security Group, the only one of the 30 officers affected by the reshuffle to be unmoved.

PNP chief Director Gen. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. said however that Berroya would be yanked out soon and given a non-PNP post.

Berroya is reportedly being groomed for a key position in the Bureau of Corrections.

He and Director Eduardo Matibluan, erstwhile chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, were said to be among several officers who asked Malacañang that they be spared from the revamp, resulting in the postponement of the changes to 17 key PNP positions.

The affected personnel concerned in the PNP think of command and retention about Malacañang's resolve to submit the police organization.

Aside from Matibluan, the officers affected in the second wave of the revamp were Chief Superintendents Alfredo de Vera, Jaime Caringal, Bernardo Bitoon, Reynaldo Gutierrez, Antonio Bilocura and Manuel Rayel, and Senior Superintendents Arturo Cacdac, Ceasar Bustos and Raul Castañeda.

Also affected were Director Oliver P. Piñeiro, Commander of the Logistics Support Service, Director of Region 12 (Central Mindanao) and Bureau of the Investigative Support Service Castañeda has been appointed PNP deputy director.

Like Rayel, De Vera has been temporarily assigned to Ebdane's office while waiting for Bureau to be moved out of the CSG.

Caringal lost his post as Calabarzon regional director in favor of Senior Supt. Nicanor Bartolome, the provincial director of the Batangas Police Office.

Caringal was supposed to be moved to Region 12 until he probably complained against the alleged lack of consultation and professionalism of the revamp.

A senior police official privy to the revamp initially said Caringal was "bumped out of Calabarzon" so Bartolome could be a trusted lieutenant of Director Gen. Avelino Razon Jr. (Central Mindanao) and Bartolome's former boss, Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil, could take his post.

"The SCIDG post was actually meant to squeeze Caringal," the source said.

But Caringal, a member of Philippine Military Academy Class 1976, has said he does not want the SCIDG's No. 3 post as there were more senior PMA graduates available for the job.

Senior Supt. Nicardo Rupid, the new head of the Mobile Group, is another official that Ebdane is reportedly having groomed for a key post at the Bureau of Corrections.

Rupid, who graduated from the PMA Class 1981, which is considered Ebdane's "favorite" batch.

"The move to take his batch (PMA Class 1978) was really good because he's much senior to Mendoza," the official said.

Even if the PNP revamp is almost completed, the PNP leadership could still decide to move officers to new posts even after the announcement or appointments orders either on Dec. 18, said Senior Supt. Joel Goltiao, the PNP information officer.

He said however, assignments only need to be approved by the Commission on Elections.

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Corpus says Reds have infiltrated PIA

LAOAG (27)—Former spy chief Brig. Gen. Victor Corpus yesterday disclosed that a rebel network of government employees, which allegedly serves as front of the communist party of the Philippines, has infiltrated the government's propaganda machine.

Corpus, now chief of the military's Civil Relations Group, told reporters that members of the left-leaning Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (Courage) now control the Philippine Information Agency.

According to Corpus, he already knows about the "infiltration" late days or the (unidentified) source Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (SAFP).

Corpus, a former ranking valet of the New People's Army (NPA), said that even the communists are now also using the the structure of the country's government to act.

The BIA, which the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos ordered to thwart the growing communist threat in the '70s, was reportedly known Corpus suggested when they learned some following of deaths in it.

A former Hon. Ebenezer, director of the PIA for Southern Mindanao, lambasted Corpus' statement as highly "irresponsible." "It endangers our situation as employees of PIA," he said.

He challenged Corpus to open. As who is PIA office now being controlled by communists instead of making sweeping accusations.

Corpus, however, insisted the report was credible although he could not specific as infiltrated PIA office.

Corpus' statement was backed by Academy Abuloanes Elizabeth Reyes and there were no concerted effort by the police and the military to save a "red scare."

"There is a plan for everyone to be vigilant so that no one subversive group or government employees," Reyes said.

Corpus, known as Si Ronny to the underground movement, urged congress to resurrect the anti-subversive law "so the military can effectively fight the insurgency or insurgency problem in the country."

But other political groups worried that the reinvention of the BIA would only lead to more human rights violations and unnecessary executions of civilians suspected of being members and sympathizers. Anthony S. Alberto and Ferdinand D. Jimenez, PIA Mindanao bureau.

Drilon: No 2nd look at Cha-cha in Senate

By Christine D. Avendaño and Carlos Pablo

SENATE President Franklin Drilon yesterday stressed to his colleagues that the House in the upper chamber would take a "second look" at Charter change because of the possibility of an area being president for the area as being.

A shift in a parliamentary form of government is proposed under Charter change would greatly curtail the powers of the President.

Drilon said what he read for Senators was that it would be "difficult" for Congress to push for Charter change at this time.

Not only has Congress run out of time but the "people might look at it as being politically motivated," Drilon said from Bangkok, Thailand, where he is attending a conference.

The "specter of the proposal to shift to a parliamentary system would be lost in the political debates," he said.

Drilon said he told De Venecia all this when the latter called him up on Thursday.

He said the Congress had only 10 session days left before a recess for February.

"But, he stressed, now we about a time to hold debates "on the media-ranging changes the proponents of Charter change want to achieve."

"So it's best that we wait for the next Congress to tackle Charter change," he said.

Besides, with the elections less than six months away "the people might perceive our moves to shift to a parliamentary system as a ploy to succeed themselves," he said.

Drilon said he told De Venecia that he was not against Charter change but that he was only "looking at the political realities."

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TOKYO CHEERS
President Macapagal Arroyo orders Asean leaders in a toast during a dinner hosted by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at a Tokyo hotel on Thursday. With GMA are, from left, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The four are wearing "happi," a traditional Japanese half-coat, and drinking rice wine from a "masu," a wooden cube cup. —AP

GMA says celebrity factor not enough

Lacson organizes: Iraqi or Senate?

MANILA, Rome dot—Sen. Lacson Legarda said she is "hesitating" whether to run for vice president or seek reelection.

"I'm No. 1 in the survey [among the senatorial aspirants]. It's not really [if I run for senator]. It's not new to me and so far same time I can serve the country," Legarda told reporters here on Thursday.

She admitted, however, that running for vice president is more challenging and exhausting.

"The fight is tougher, more costly, more tiring. But there is a risk, I can move to another capacity and I will accept the challenge to be the running mate of any presidential candidate," she said.

Legarda said all presidential aspirants, including President Macapagal, had offered her to be their running mate. Lacson, Aquino Jr., Erap and Senators Loyzaga Romulo

TOKYO—It may have helped sweep Arnold Schwarzenegger to office. And it was undeniably a factor in bringing her own presidency a huge victory at the polls.

But President Macapagal said Friday her nation is no place to vote her out of office just because her appearance is an action movie star.

"Personality is obviously a factor," she told a small group of journalists in Tokyo Friday after the closing of the two-day Japan-Asean summit. "But at the end of the day, they want more than personality."

Arroyo was referring to actor Joseph Estrada, who announced last month he will run for president in next May's elections.

"I believe the voters have great wisdom, and will focus on experience and accomplishments over personality," Arroyo said.

—AP

No queues for Imelda

MEDIA ex-First Lady, even one faced with multiple graft cases, still counts for something.

Imelda Marcos, the widow of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, yesterday skipped the waiting queued by going directly to the Commission on Elections office in Intramuros to have her registration validated—the only voter known to have done so.

Marcos headed straight for the office of Commissioner Luzviminda Tancangco, who chairs the validation program.

Tancangco was not around when Imelda arrived at about 8:30 a.m., but Imelda still got the royal treatment from her staff.

She was given her own validating machine to make the process more quicker.

Other people here to queue as early as 5 a.m. to make sure they get their validation done in two hours.

The validation process that started on Aug. 1 ended yesterday. More than 5 million

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MEGALOTTO 6/45: 12 22 25 33 39 40

Editor Abelardo S. Ulanday

Bilibid warden sacked

BuCor chief cites case of jail visitor detained for 8 months

By Margaux Ortiz

ARSENALES

A Bilibid warden's order to security has been found to be the wrong side of prison bars for eight months and has left Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) chief Reynaldo Santiago fuming.

Santiago has ordered the relief of National Bilibid Prisons (NBP) Supt. Francisco Arsenales, after he learned that trash driver Rodolfo "Boy" Tiap, had been locked up at the facility's maximum security compound since April.

According to BuCor spokesperson and public information officer Raul Sapit, Wu Jr. Room, Barrio go on Thursday night called from abroad inquiring about the release of Tiap, 35, a delivery truck driver and resident of Barangay Magtong, Rizal, Tambobong del Norte.

Santiago is in Hong Kong for a conference.

Tenorio said Tiap was "turned over" to his lawyer and cousin at around 8:10 p.m. on Thursday, after BuCor officials confirmed that he had been wrongfully imprisoned since April.

"[Santiago] was furious and because of leniency on the part of Supt. Arsenales," Tenorio told the Inquirer in an interview. "He ordered how a visitor could have remained inside the maximum security compound for a long time."

Santiago also gave instructions that Arsenales' relief must take place immediately, Tenorio said. "Supt. Arsenales' failure to properly account for his prisoners had an adverse effect on his career."

The Inquirer tried to reach Arsenales, but he was not available for comment.

Tenorio said they immediately checked out Tiap's prisoners in jail as soon as they received the information five months ago. But he assumed that the maximum security compound has over 10,000 inmates, which made it hard for them to trace anomalies like Tiap's presence.

Tenorio said Tiap had come all the way from Zamboanga last April to visit his cousin friend Renato Villamor.

But Villamor had begged Tiap not to tell his relatives for fear of convincing him to testify against the prisoner's complainant.

"The day he never turned into weeks, then months," Tenorio said, adding that Tiap was fearful that if he told BuCor officials about his situation, the other inmates would "do him harm."

Tenorio said that after internal investigation, they found out that Tiap did not commit any criminal offense and was only "guilty of wrongfulness."

"The court was could punish him with is to free him from visiting NBP in the future," Tenorio said.

Tenorio said Tiap was visibly pale when he was released from prison, although he was seen heard to be physically fit.

This was confirmed by Tiap's lawyer, Artemio Mata.

DAILY ADORNED

Gender activists, artists, health advocates and members of the International Gay and Lesbian Association are gathering at the Bayview Hotel in Manila for the 22nd World Conference on Gay and Lesbian Rights. Here, gay men and lesbians line up to have their bodies adorned with images of butterflies to mark the event. DAVID CC

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After buses, NCRPO trains guns on jeeps

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

[illegible] come the anniversaries.

In line with the program outlined by his predecessor, Director Ricardo De Leon of the Regional Highway Patrol Office, has ordered the random deployment of plainclothes policemen on passenger jeepneys roaming today.

This was in answer to the clamor of jeepney operators who, in a meeting on Thursday, had asked the NCRPO for assistance to stem the rise of robberies on passenger vehicles. Lieutenant Col. Jose Pabalan would also monitor activities on roaming jeepneys. De Leon told the Inquirer.

He also said that passengers who wanted to seen standing on a jeepney's running board would be asked to get off and inspected.

De Leon revealed that it is common for jeepney robbers to think the vehicle's crossover by clinging on the side and standing on the running board outside, while their cohorts rob the passengers inside.

Former NCRPO director and now Philippine Drug Enforcement Director General Cesar Mancao Reynaldo Nemenzo launched the hot detention program covered motorcycles to thwart highway robbery incidents. The program has received the support and praise of bus operators and drivers.

Metro LGUs firm up anti-terror measures

NATIONAL Security Adviser Roilo Golbez yesterday held a security briefing where he informed members of the Metro Manila Council of the counter-terrorist measures to be undertaken by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and local government units.

During a meeting with MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando, representatives of Metro Manila mayors, chiefs of police, fire chiefs, police investigators and assistant chiefs of police, police chiefs, training and assistant chiefs of police, and assistant police chiefs for operations, Golbez presented the [illegible] to be conducted in each local government unit.

In a bid to counter terrorism in the metropolis during the holidays, Golbez yesterday presented a three-tiered defense plan to be implemented in the metropolis. This would involve intelligence work, the "hardening" or strengthening of possible targets, and contingency management in case of attacks.

"The mayors shall be designated as crisis managers in each territorial," Golbez said.

Under the coordination by his new security team in Jakarta, Indonesia to learn how the country recovered in the aftermath of the Madrid bombing earlier this year.

"Then we would try to apply the counter-terrorism measures we have learned from them here," he said.

"These measures will hopefully heighten awareness and ensure our vigilance against terrorist acts, especially during the holidays," Fernando said. Margaux Ortiz

PDEA official says he did not shoot NBI man

By Leila Salaverria

A PARKING official of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) has come forward to say he, and not a colleague, had been among those accused of shooting an agent of the National Bureau of Investigation last week.

Senior Supt. Orlando Mendoza of the PDEA has also denied that he had been charged for shooting NBI Special Investigator Marwin Marcelo.

In a letter sent to the Inquirer, Mendoza said that he took command of the Special Enforcement Service (SES) because he is the regional director of the PDEA's Metro Manila Regional Office.

He added that his concerned—SES members Will Sherman Ruiz Mallon and PO1 Marwin Rubio—were not under him. He said he had said [illegible] from until the names were published in the papers.

Mendoza also said that he does not know armed with bodyguards and motorists, a good standing in society and in the PNP.

He also said that [illegible] Director Arturo Lomibao and Deputy Director Reynaldo De Leon of the Regional Highway Patrol Office has ordered the random deployment of plainclothes policemen on passenger jeepneys roaming today.

Former NCRPO director and now Philippine Drug Enforcement Director General Cesar Mancao Reynaldo Nemenzo launched the hot detention program covered motorcycles to thwart highway robbery incidents. The program has received the support and praise of bus operators and drivers.

DOJ: 5 more Kuratong witnesses

By Philip C. Tubeza

DOJ: 5 more Kuratong witnesses

By Philip C. Tubeza

Five more state witnesses are expected to confirm their sworn statements in the Kuratong Baleleng massacre case, the Department of Justice said yesterday.

Acting Justice Secretary Jose Calida said the five were separate cases in addition to the four other witnesses whose names have been announced before and presented to the media.

"With these developments, we are confident that Special [Acting] Judge [Teresita] Tating would see why [Justice Secretary] Leila [de Lima] is recused but also disqualified in granting bail," he added.

Special Action Force members Senior Insp. Rizalino Ligda, PO3 Donald Ferrales, PO1 Jaime Jacinto, and SPO1 Lauro Vello pulled Chief Insp. Rolando Ilo, who confessed earlier, to show that eight of the 11 suspected Kuratong members killed in Commonwealth Avenue, Quezon City on May 18, 2009 were injured after the eight, before dying, had met at the patrolmen's headquarters in Camp Crame.

"This is important because it shows that there was no shootout along Commonwealth Avenue. The eight were captured alive and were brought to Camp Crame. If there [is] no shootout, [why] Camp Crame, how could there have been a shootout in Commonwealth?" Calida told reporters.

Calida said the families of the five policemen have been placed under the Witness Protection Program.

The government now suffered a setback after Tating dismissed the murder case against Lacson and the others for lack of probable cause.

The gang leader has opposed the case and called Ilo a traitor for withdrawing his plea.

Ilo said they were part of two PNP hit teams that ended the Kuratong Baleleng addresses at Area Search Operation at the night of May 17 for the return of Lacson, then Police Chief Senior Supt. Jose Leuterio and Senior Supt. Francisco Ebdane.

They said the two teams spent hundred eight Kuratong suspects and seized them one by the men of Lacson, Army, Cameron and Ebdane. The said the four officers were involved in the knows after the raid.

The witnesses said they were supposed to take only the eight suspects were killed in an alleged shootout. They noted that the suspects were killed in the van the Ilo's PNP men recovered earlier at Kapanalan.

"When we turned over the eight Kuratong suspects arrested at the gamble, they were not only alive, they were unarmed and defenseless. They could not have been a shootout," Ilo said.

Tip to 'hotline' leads to fall of No. 4 kidnapper

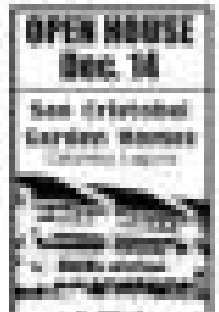
A 911-aligned group in the Department of Interior and Local Government's "911 Kids and Lab Rabbits" on the alleged abuse of a mentally ill boy by the gang leader before the latter's arrest.

Ella Nicholson's first call to 911 led to Salvador Marcelino Lim, 46, "Boy" called up a 911-911 operation on Dec. 3 to say that Allen Megan, the country's fourth most wanted kidnapper, was hiding in Caloocan, Lima.

Lim said the hotline operators immediately relayed the information.

Lim's police in Caloocan, Lima, have arrested Megan, who has a 10 million kidnap victim from Manila. Nicholson's accusation, saying the police turned him up and was himself a victim of kidnapping. Robert V. Flores

El Shaddai on GMA endorsement: It is still too early



By Norman Bordadora and Carlos Pablo

THE EL SHADDAI Catholic charismatic group yesterday denied it had established connection with President Macapagal-Arroyo in seeking her endorsement for reelection next year's polls.

El Shaddai spokesperson Mel Robles told the Inquirer the issue of a presidential endorsement was a division one that the organization did not need to address at this time.

"The elections are still quite far off. There is a time for everything and now is not the time for political endorsements," Robles said in a phone interview.

He did admit, however, that the El Shaddai leader is known for his strong support of the administration.

"Bro. Mike Velarde and El Shaddai are in fact supporting the presidency and the President's program of reconciliation and unity," he said.

"But it is still too early to talk about the elections," he added.

"I don't know if my division already made (by the El Shaddai) to support any particular candidate. The official position right now is the endorsement will be for all to work on measures of support reinforcement."

The silence of well-placed sources in Malacañang could be because the Palace had wanted the support of the millions-strong El Shaddai movement that votes as a bloc.

The source, who asked not to be named, said the Palace was good for two to three million votes and would be the "bet" in the Iglesia ni Cristo bloc, which is notorious for delivering votes.

The source said Arroyo's political handlers were also hoping that the El Shaddai would help in the campaign against the administration's opponents.

VELARDE: A division over

Malacañang believes the INC will not back Eduardo Ermita, one of the opposition's presidential aspirants.

"The position of the INC now is what's keeping Ermita from withdrawing from the race in favor of Fernando Poe Jr.," said the source.

Poe and Lacson are considering the opposition's endorsement to be announced before 2004.

But certain quarters in Malacañang were hoping to gain the backing of the INC for Mr Macapagal, the source said.

It will be recalled that ex-President Joseph Estrada handily won the 1998 elections after both the El Shaddai and the INC threw their support behind him.

But the source said another religious sect could be the swing vote in the battle for the religious vote.

"President Macapagal is counting on the Jesus is Lord Movement vote and the evangelical vote," the source said.

JIL head Bro. Eddie Villanueva, however, said he is not actively campaigning a vote for the presidency himself—in the strength of his sect's reelection. JIL-spokesperson

Gov't expects to get its hands very soon on $683-M Marcos loot

By Dona Pazzibugan

THE GOVERNMENT expects to get its hands very soon on the $683-million Marcos loan deposits which the Supreme Court has ordered forfeited to the government.

Sources in the Presidential Commission on Good Government said the agency expects the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court to issue the writ next week with a writ of execution that would begin the transfer of the funds to the National Treasury.

However, Malacañang has yet to issue the guidelines to ensure that the funds will not be used for other purposes than agrarian reform.

According to PCGG Commissioner Ipat Aguirre, the main guideline for processing the funds is the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law which prescribes that all ill-gotten wealth recovered from the funds of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his cronies go to agrarian reform.

The funds, though deposited abroad, are being held in an escrow account at the Philippine National Bank.

According to the escrow agreement set by the Swiss federal courts, the PNB can only release the money when the Supreme Court makes a final ruling on its merits.

The high tribunal did so last July 31, declaring the Marcos loans/deposits to be ill-gotten. It affirmed its decision on Nov. 18.

But the Sandiganbayan, the original court that handled the forfeiture case, has yet to file issued the order to execute the judgment.

Aguirre said that from the PNB, the money would go into a "special fund" in the National Treasury earmarked for agrarian reform.

But the budget department has also appropriated P1 billion for the compensation of the victims of human rights abuses of the Marcos regime.

One of the conditions that the Swiss court set for releasing the Marcos deposits was that a portion of the money would be used to compensate the rights-abuse victims.

Congress is now debating a compromise bill proposing to use P100 billion of the money to compensate the victims.

"We hope Congress would hurry up with the compromise law," said Aguirre.

There is concern that Congress will not be able to pass the law before the year elections.

The PNB spokesperson is still trying to recover the $22 million out of the $683 million that is being withheld by the German bank, then LIB's branch in Singapore.

The bank wants a court in Singapore to decide how who owns the money between it and the PCGG's principal client, Imelda Marcos, is settled. It is trying to prove the government robbed liquidity and managed to get all its other supported illegitimate assets of the Marcoses & Cronies.

METROBRIEFS

"Mayor" crosses red light

TRAFFIC ENFORCER SLO Constantine Tang, a businessman from Binondo, Manila, was arrested yesterday in Manila after he reportedly drove through a red light and then refused to hand over his license when questioned. According to UPSO Antonio Emmanuel, Tang was apprehended by SPO4 Arturo Go of the Office of Municipal Traffic Affairs at Intersection of Ayala Avenue and Paseo de Roxas when the light was still red. Police later discovered that the businessman was also a fake "Mayor" has reached. **Jake Maderazo**

P1 million plus jail time

OFW Rolando Pacamalan, a police senior sergeant at the Bulacan Provincial Police Office, was arrested by the Bulacan Provincial Police Office, was found guilty of shooting Emilio Gomez, a security guard from Parcel Home, Sta. Maria, Manila, yesterday. Court says he showed that about 4 p.m. on May 20, 2003, while watching Cesar Chavez Street in Sta. Maria, Manila, he was allegedly shot Emilio Gomez because of his drinking habit. While he was walking along Castellano Street, he came upon Pacamalan who pointed a gun at him, then fired him a warning shot. Pacamalan was found guilty of the crime of homicide and sentenced to 14 years, four months, six days to 17 years, four months. He was also ordered to pay P1,125,000 to the family of Gomez. **Tina Gonzalez**

Manila to reward execs

MEMO Manila Mayor Lito Atienza's office will have been encouraging city's residents for the past nine years. The Manila City Council has passed an ordinance that will give distinguished citizens an executive incentive for foreign officials who have spent three to seven years in foreign posts. Qualified officials from the city's 897 barangays include chiefs and bagmanok officers and should be from their towns without ever having criminal or administrative charges. **Tina Gonzalez**

Drunk stabs friend

CORRECTION Sto., 28, was charged that after two bottle of gin and beer, he had stabbed his friend, Emerson Jose Sr., 33, in the head with a knife. The incident allegedly took place at the Tambo area and Jose was found dying near Pioneer Street, Barangay Pinyahan, Malabon City at 8:45 a.m. When Santos got drunk, he allegedly pulled out a knife and stabbed Jose, hitting him in the head and body. Witnesses brought Jose to the Malabon Tambo Hospital where he died. Santos was arrested by barangay tanodmen. **Edson Tandoc Jr.**

Assumption homecoming

THE ASSUMPTION Antipolo Alumnae Association, Inc. (AAAI), will be holding its general assembly and homecoming today with a concert entitled "Harana". Sponsored by Beyond Libraries, this acoustic concert will feature basic hosts Monina Bautista, MTRP, and Ray Valera and the band of the Manila Philharmonic Band. Assumption Antipolo at 1 p.m. Tickets are available at P200 each. For inquiries, contact Dolores Bolisay at 632-5711 to 0920-9789348. Non-member Antipolo alumni can also contact their respective batch representatives regarding this event.

Holy Trinity Reunion

THE HOLY Trinity Academy is urging all graduates to attend the reunion at the YCA campus in Pasay City, Sapphire Residential on Dec. 20, 21 and 28. For more information, contact Ms. Lilia Pinedo Pua at (02) 426-6336, (02) 426-6338 and call phone number (0917) 806-5299. For inquiries on Newcomers, school principal, at (02) 440-3080 and (02) 440-9086.

A MEMBER of the group Hanapbuhay Rest sa Bisay (HTB), a movement seeking the abolition of deal-specialty in the country, displays the grievance sticker of a policeman who, HTB spokesperson Hyssa Bandalan accused President Macapagal-Arroyo patronizing of 100 during the lives of convicts to boost her political ambitions. PHOTO BY

GMA suspends sale of mental health property

By Nikko Cenzanes

GIVING in to protests, Malacañang has indefinitely postponed public bidding for the 11-hectare property which hosts the state-run National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) and the Convention Center in Manila.

Two Cabinet officials yesterday explained that the President's decision was in response to clamors by NCMH workers and the need to secure necessary fund for the care-related to the first of health workers, patients and inmates, who all face eviction.

Referred to as Parcel 1, the 11-hectare portion of the NCMH-Bicutan Complex is supposed to be opened for bidding on Jan. 12 next year.

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit and Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman clarified, however, that bidding for the 29-hectare Parcel 2 will proceed as scheduled on Jan. 9.

The government is also clarified that proceeds from the exclusively for mental hospital.

"The rest I will be told only when housing projects in Parcel 2 are in place," Soliman, who heads the Tiyanak Committee overseeing the sale, said in a press conference in Quezon City.

In the same forum, Malacañang Mayor Heherson Alvarez confirmed that the city was interested in Parcel 1.

Two attempts to hold the Wednesday in the "We failed because of the question of where to move the informal settlers," Soliman said. The "tenants" lied to the current tact of selling the land to parcels.

Since last October, the NCMH's 1,000 employees have been demonstrating against the sale of Parcel 1.

Apart from worrying about their job security, they are questioning the viability of the plan to distribute the center's 3,000 patients among regional hospitals.

Speaking for the employees, NCMH Administrator Involves Asst Cherice Aguilar said, "We are not totally happy" with the announcement, since the rule can still proceed any time to the future.

"The best to appease the employees for now perhaps [is] the President's promise for the President in view of the coming elections," she told the reporters.

Convict appeals to Gloria, 'Spare us!'

By Tina Santos

LEMUEL Lumayag, one of five men convicted for the murder of former Col. Rolando Abadilla, is fighting death as two years from a hospital bed in Quezon City.

Lumayag, 47, is struggling to keep the new kidney that is keeping him alive and is appealing to President Macapagal-Arroyo to let the death penalty which is awaiting convict die him.

"I hope the President would consolidate her sound and bring back the moratorium [on death penalty]," Lumayag said, appealing for the humanitarian concerns on death row.

He has been confined at the National Kidney and Transplant Institute for the past year, spending P60,000 a month for drugs so that his body would not reject the kidney transplanted from his wife.

The death penalty moratorium is being to waste all efforts to keep him alive.

Citing his experiences and for life loss of the prisoners, Lumayag said they were victims of injustice.

He insisted that he, Cesar Fortuna, Joel de Jesus, Raimundo de Jesus and Reginaldo Santos were convicted into awakening to Abadilla's killing.

They were sentenced to die three years ago by the Quezon City Regional Trial Court. However, they rose to under automatic review by the Supreme Court.

The human rights case against the police officers accused of torturing the so-called Abadilla 5 has already been filed, according to Lumayag.

"We are glad we can hope to the Supreme Court's justice and the reopening of the human rights case," he said, adding that they were looking forward to living around their sons.

Chinoys seek China's help vs trafficking

By Christine V. Figueroa

MEMBERS of the Chinese Filipino community yesterday urged Chinese authorities to join the government's crackdown against illegal drugs.

At a manifesto signed by 26 groups, the Chinese Filipino Community Peace and Order Coordination Council asked the Chinese government to prevent drug traffickers from coming to the Philippines.

The groups stated that most of the suspects arrested and identified as operators of drug laboratories in the country were Chinese.

"We believe the Chinese government will not tolerate the involvement of its nationals in the manufacturing and trading of illegal drugs in the Philippines," they wrote.

Local authorities have dismantled at least 26 clandestine laboratories and arrested dozens of suspects since January this year.

The Chinese Filipinos told the Chinese government that the illicit activities of its nationals were giving the Philippine community a bad image.

2 Isafp officers rapped over 10 fake agents

THE COMMANDER of Office of the Intelligence Service of the armed forces of the Philippines (Isafp) has filed graft charges against two former officials.

Commander Tirso Danga, lodged the charges before the Quezon City Prosecutor's Office against Air Force Lt. Col. Nestor Sabado and Army Capt. Marlon Mendoza, both formerly with the Military Intelligence Group 20.

Danga accused Sabado and Mendoza of giving benefits reserved for only agents to 10 persons not members of the service.

Among the charges are the violation of Republic Act 3019 or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, violation of Presidential Decree 1866 for issuing authority to carry firearms and ammunitions and for falsely pretending to possess authority to issue official documents.

In his complaint, Danga said Sabado and Mendoza falsely said they appeared to the affected plaintiffs as members of the Isafp with a monthly allowance of P3,000 each.

They also reportedly issued firearms, ammunition and identification cards to the 10 persons. They further

Aventajado's charge vs Wee unfair

ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

ROBERT Aventajado, former Presidential Security Group (PSG) member advised by banking himself look good in his book, "140 Days of Terror in the Churches of the Abu Sayyaf," at the expense of his fellow negotiators in the Rizalito hostage crisis in 2000.

Aventajado, for example, says that then Libyan Ambassador to the Philippines Abdurasak Bajuli advising and Muhammad Ismail skimmed off part of the P25-million ransom money for the European hostages.

Another person downgrade seems to be taking a cut from the ransom payment is Zamboanga City mobile billionaire Loreto Wee, his son that after some P1 million in "food and lodging" of the Malaysian hostages and demanded a P2-million reimbursement.

Curiously, Aventajado launched his book a few days after the capture of Abu Sayyaf leader Ghaith Andang, alias Commander Robot, by military intelligence agents in Jolo.

Aventajado dealt with Commander Robot for the release of the European hostages, while they worked on the release of the Malaysian hostages last year.

Robot is undergoing tactical interrogation by the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) on his hospital bed.

Will fill the 1st hole in the list, some of the day will surely splatter on Aventajado's face.

Whether Wee received a P2-million reimbursement for spending P1 million on the hostages, Aventajado should have kept quiet.

Why? Because he is reportedly much, much more.

But I think that part of the ransom payment may have found its way to Malacañang at the time.

Former President Ramos was not beyond such a strategy, stashing money dealt. Being racing kingpin in single-Mayo president to JP-up.

And since Ramos was not an honest leader, what could you expect from his No. 1 subordinate?

Lepanto Wee wanted very much to buy the Mimosa resort inside Clark and asked Ramos (they were still very close friends then) if he could be given the privilege.

After a couple of weeks, Wee backed out of the deal.

Why? Ramos found his cabinet wanted 50 percent ownership of the Mimosa resort while Wee would only own 40 percent. The money to buy the resort would all be put up by the Zambonga City businessman.

"Mind your own gig, Presidente, Wee," Wee told me.

Peter Wee, He didn't know what he was talking about. He was the spokesman for the Malaysian families of the Sipadan hostages. Aventajado struggled him to contact the most.

The business tried to reach Wee but was only able to talk to Tony Angeles, his lawyer. A fax copy of Aventajado's accusation against Wee in his book was sent to the businessman.

Wee instead of defending his client, the provincial lawyer buried Wee deeper in the mud when he told the financier his client was not making any commitment.

Gee, Lapulapu must rip alright as Angeles could have denied Aventajado statement outright.

Why am I saying this? Because Wee never benefited from the ransom payment. I should know. I was in constant touch with Lepang till the end.

He was advanced payment for "board and lodging" of the Malaysian hostages. Like some 24-peso Chinese who have friends in high places, Wee wanted his friend Ramos to put his name on the backs of letters. He got none.

So Lepang Wee, P1 million is home change. Why would he be so petty as to claim an excess of P1 million in reimbursement?

The truth is Wee never received the money that he spent on the Malaysians. He never even told me, his close friend, how much money was spent on the Malaysians.

"Money is no object as long as the Malaysians are freed and our President says that I'm working," the Chinaman Chinoy told me in kidding. Kidding, in short, he was "upak" to bingo.

After being upak (subservient) to his Excellency Lepang, I guess he's "upak" to Peter Gee.

Customs exceeds goal

From page A1

The Philippines has run deficits in nine of the past 11 years due to uneasy currency rates, evasion, corruption and rising costs to service debts that hit nearly P600 billion in September.

The government hopes to keep the deficit set this at 4.7 percent of projected gross domestic product this year after last year's 5.2 percent.

In the first 10 months of 2004, the deficit was P383.69 billion, considerably lower than the target of P471.00 billion.

Fiscal crisis?

Broker Jose Isidro Camacho, who resigned as finance secretary last month, said the other day that the country was in fiscal crisis because of its huge debt burden. But he said it would easy effort in the run-up to next year's elections.

In Tokyo, Japan, where she was attending a summit with donor leaders, President Macapagal-Arroyo responded to Camacho's comments cautiously.

In a statement, the President said: "Camacho served well as finance secretary and we shall continue to listen to his views from outside the government. The administration is listening to the debate on good governance and economic stability very closely as we pave the way for this political and economic security."

In a morning [illegible] Tokyo Thursday night, the President initially expressed doubts about whether Camacho was properly quoted by media. "I will have to ask Jiko if he said this because sometimes people get misquoted."

The President emphasized that Camacho continued to be supportive of her government and that he departed from her administration on good terms.

Purisima to replace Camacho?

In the meeting, the President also dropped hints that SEVT & Co. chair Cesar Purisima was her choice as Trade and Industry Secretary to replace Manuel A. Roxas II, who will run for senator next year.

"I will announce my choice when I get back to Manila. He has to inform his partners from the private sector, he is a known business leader and well respected," the President said.

Mr Macapagal said her government was on its "third wind," saying that the latest budget data showed that the government was below its target budget deficit this year.

"We have achieved fiscal discipline in the short term and we are going to the next step, the long-term reform which is aimed at having a balanced budget by 2009 and lowering the debt to GDP (gross national product) ratio," the President said.

Gonzalez had also validated Congress for dragging its feet on important legislative reforms, such as reducing limits on tobacco and alcoholic drinks to collection, converting the Bureau of Internal Revenue into a separate agency, and rationalizing the investment incentives.

BIR target

Customs is mandated to account for about 17 percent of total government revenues this year. The Bureau of Internal Revenue must raise from 71 percent to some collect, or P626.5billion.

As of November, the BIR said it had collected P481.384 billion. In order to collect at least P626billion this month to meet the target.

Acting Finance Secretary Juanito Amatong said the government was likely to end the year with a budget deficit of about P300 billion. It not better, against a target of P332 billion. Last year, the deficit reached P324.7 billion against a ceiling of P289 billion.

Amatong said the gap between revenues and expenditures in November was likely below the P174.6billion target for the month, because of strong collections and disciplined spending.

A government source said the deficit last month stood at about P34 billion, based on preliminary numbers.

The government is expected to blow the budget deficit this month. In, P6 billion, because of the additional P5,000 each gift for Christmas to each of the national government's one million employees, a move that was not included in the reprofit tax program for the year. *With reports from Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. in Tokyo, Japan*

Some gov't...

From page A1

"It's not luck. It's just one of their cunning ploys to launder ill-gotten wealth," said Customs Commissioner Antonio Bernardo. Bocos during a committee hearing on making graft investigations more adept in catching crooks in government.

The seminar on financial investigation was conducted by the American Bar Association Asia Law Initiative and the US Internal Revenue Service.

A graft investigation video asked one to be raised such 65-56 HMO officials being investigated for graft have donated to have even stamp, stakes down, lotteries and other raffle draws during their under-year to justify their wealth.

The investigators said these officials or the Bureau of Customs have to follow the same steps.

Buy winning tickets

But graft investigators are not impressed.

Bocos said it was not uncommon for corrupt officials to buy winning sweepstakes or lottery tickets from the real winners at a price higher than the amount actually won. This is intended to justify the flow of huge amounts of cash into their bank accounts or their purchase of expensive vehicles or their placement in investments.

"When they are really after is the [winning] check ... That check is documentary proof that they received a large amount of money through honest means," Bocos said.

The official can then use the money for business, buy bigger property or construct a bigger house.

"That lottery check will serve as his defense against doubts on how he suddenly obtained a huge amount of money," Bocos said.

The modus operandi is not limited to Philippine grafters, it seems.

During the seminar, the speakers from the United States said corrupt American officials sometimes are supposed casino chairmen to launder their illegally acquired money.

A grafter would pay several people to buy large amounts, say $50,000, of gaming chips in casinos and tell them to play only a small amount. Later that day, they are supposed to get him back the chips which he then encashes at the casino cashier.

Instead of cash, the grafter would ask the cashier to issue him a check, representing the amount he supposedly won in the casino.

The check is then passed off as a legitimate source of the grafter's increased assets.

The seminar yesterday was part of a series of workshops aimed at improving the capacities of Philippine graft investigators who have been aggressively waging a lifestyle check campaign since the second quarter last year.

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Casco

Blasts rock US compound in Baghdad

BAGHDAD—A series of explosions peppered the US headquarters in the Iraqi capital Friday after a US soldier died in a suicide truck bombing as mass resignations almost halved the first battalion of the new Iraqi army.

Reported assessments from US top brass at variously 600 to the guilty jailed of "blood and violence in Iraq where three suicide bombers have blown themselves up in as many days under American boots.

Four explosions followed by two more loud blasts had rung out as an evening about half past midnight in Baghdad followed by recollen big boom Friday morning.

"Five projectiles impacted in the vicinity of the Green Zone," a military spokesperson said regarding no casualties.

"One caused minor damage to a building," he said, "no investigations ongoing."

Attacks could be seen rising into the clear blue morning sky near the Coalition Provisional Authority headquarters in the city center after the latest explosions.

Iraqi police on the edge of the Green Zone reported it was probably a controlled explosion of ordnance. The US military had no immediate information about the blast.

One US soldier died and 14 others were wounded Thursday in a truck bombing outside the relief town of Ramadi, 100 km west of Baghdad.

"A fertilizer truck was driven by a suicide bomber," an approximately 1:00 p.m. or Thursday in Main Chief Airborne Division Headquarters, in the vicinity of Ramadi," a statement said.

"It is believed that 6 Iraqis driving the vehicle were killed in the explosion," another statement said.

A suicide car bomber wounded 10 soldiers near the northern city of Mosul and another would be killer blew himself up just short of a base south of Baghdad on Sunday.

Troops from the 1st Armored Division found the body of a 2nd-Lt. sniper who thwarted Wednesday night during a routine patrol of the Tigris River in Baghdad, the coalition said.

Another soldier who jumped to to save him was still missing, the statement said.

A US defense source told AFP that the US military was considering the withdrawal of some 10,000 troops from Iraq next year, a move that would be a major boost to the country's struggling economy.

"If these countries want to participate in helping the world become more secure by enabling Iraq to emerge as a free and peaceful country, one way to show it is by sending their soldiers to help," he told reporters.

Washington says that debt, which the International Monetary Fund estimates at about $120 billion, hampers efforts to get the country back on its feet following three wars since Saddam Hussein's ouster in 1991 and 13 years of UN sanctions.

Iraq owes some $41 billion of that total amount to the 19 members of the Paris Club of creditor nations.

Bush's point man on the issue, Treasury secretary John Snow, and Baker, heads to Europe Monday to discuss the issue in France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Britain before reporting back to White House.

Pressed on whether countries had to commit troops to Iraq in order to get contracts, or could instead opt for debt relief, Bush replied that the latter "would be a significant contribution, for which we would be very grateful." -AFP

Halliburton overcharged in Iraq, says Pentagon

WASHINGTON—A Pentagon audit of Halliburton, the oil services firm once run by Vice President Dick Cheney, found the company may have overbilled the US government by more than $100 million on its Iraq contracts, US defense officials said on Thursday.

Defense officials said Halliburton's Kellogg Brown and Root unit, which has dominated reconstruction contracting, may have overbilled the US government by more than $100 million on its Iraq contracts. It's defense officials said on Thursday.

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The Pentagon has ruled that Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root may have overbilled the government by more than $100 million on its Iraq contracts, US

E-mail us at sports@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Rodolfo S. Melendrez
Assistant Editor Edwin M. Villanueva

RP still trails M'laysia by 2 golds

By Ernesto Gonzales

HANOI—The Philippines let past the 40-gold medal mark Friday as wrestlers Marcus Vidalo and Cris Villanueva accounted for two of six victories that failed to overhaul Malaysia on fourth place overall in the 22nd Southeast Asian Games here.

Two Filipinos, Allan Sallenave and Ivan Iris Quinones, scored in the final event of athletics and cycling, respectively, moments after Richard Clones finally landed a gold in fencing and the future of taekwondo, 15-year-old Mary Anntonette Rivero, gave her spot a fifth gold as round out the latest run of Filipino stars on the penultimate day of the 13-nation spectacle that will be held in Manila two years from now.

With 41 golds, the Filipinos remained one victory behind the Malaysians with seven events going on at press time.

Meanwhile, Vietnam surged 14 gold ahead of Thailand with 134 wins. Indonesia was a far third with 91.

Wrestling now has three golds after Vidalo walked his second victory in the freestyle open division at the expense of Le Thanh Tung of Vietnam and Villanueva scored in the under 51-kg class by beating Deanning Chan of Thailand.

Sallenave, a 20-year-old father of three from Batangas City, surrendered Ray Yavar as marathon champion to give athletics an eighth gold overall while Quinones, a Navy seaman first class from Bacoor, Cavite, clinched two prominence in the 51-km cross-country in cycling.

Ernesto died years of joy as he crushed the champion's circle to hit last (Clones) by teaming up with Andrea Victorino and Wilfredo Gonzales in the men's open team that downed Thailand in the finals, 45-32.

A popular figure in previous Filipino campaigns, Ernesto said he would now concentrate on preparing what he says is a more arduous ultra-marathon feature from hosting.

Rivero, a junior at St. Paul's Pasig, proved too much for Singapore's Chen Peng in the featherweight division at the Filipino jins surpassed by two golds from total output in Malaysia.

Sallenave pulled away from Vietnam's Nguyen Chi Dung in the final 3 km and valiant in home in two hours 23 minutes and 20 seconds. Yavar, the winner in Malaysia in 2001, was far from his old form and checked in fifth in the 11-man field in 2:29:10.

GABY Garcia (left) and Celina Cruz block a pass by the Indonesian point guard during the tightly fought match Thursday in the Olympic. The RP feminine scored a win of winning the basketball gold.

	G	S	B	T
Vietnam	134	85	82	300
Thailand	84	88	89	261
Indonesia	93	88	89	261
Malaysia	43	48	43	134
Philippines	41	48	57	137
Singapore	28	38	45	109
Myanmar	13	38	23	82
Laos	1	5	11	17
Cambodia	1	5	11	17
Brunei	1	1	7	9
East Timor	0	0	3	3

Cagebelles go for silver

HO CHI MINH—The Philippine women's basketball team can still salvage the silver medal in the 22nd Southeast Asian Games here and all they have to do is beat the Singaporeans.

The Filipinas have a 5-win, 1-loss record, the same mark of the Singaporeans.

The two sides collide today at 9 a.m. (10 a.m. in Manila).

Based on their past games, however, the Singaporeans should be tough nut to crack.

Singapore whipped Thailand, 76-56, while the Filipinas could only tally an 84-82 victory

Rivero makes it 5 for taekwondo

By Roy Luarca

HO CHI MINH—Rookie Mary Anntonette Rivero hurled an attack of cramps to beat Singapore's Chen Peng, 2-0, and capture the women's taekwondo featherweight title in the 22nd Southeast Asian Games.

"Single-night competitors are not used to a duration go the distance. I had cramps during the second round but I still fought hard," said the 15-year-old high schoolgirl from St. Paul's Pasig.

The victory of the 5-foot-7 Rivero gave the Philippines official medal tally of 5 golds, 3 silver and 5 bronze as it barely edged reigning the overall championships the spot.

Vietnam, which dislodged the Philippines in the 1999 Brunei SEAG, reigned supreme once with its 3-4-4 output at the Phu Tho Indoor Stadium.

"The gold medal is the top my country and my family.

Morning sickness or nigh nervousness as she sat as being from City Garden as all those who supported me and the team," said Rivero, also an medalist in the Junior Open earlier this year.

Unsurprisingly Undo Singapore bowed to Indon-7 Achsin Olympic qualifier Yan Hong of Vietnam by RSC (Referee Stopped Contest) in the first round at the close of competition.

Norwegian Ivar Mode Steen matched his bronze medal in the 1999 Brunei SEAG following a 6-0 loss to three-time champion Nguyen Thi Kim Dieu of Vietnam.

Olympic qualifier Tolentino Gonzaga edged by defending champion Unyalee Sombhoksuk of Thailand, 14-12, for the Bywright title.

"I'm satisfied with my results performances. They gave their best for the country," said national coach Manolo Cabral.

Viet stalls Torre; RP team ahead

TORRE: Hold a point adrift

ANTONIO

Standings after Round 1

6.5—CU Adam (Indonesia); 6.0—GM Torre (RP), IM Pungut (RP), IM Nguyen Anh Dung (Vietnam), Wong Z. Jay (Malaysia); 5.0—IM Mchedlov (RP), IM Dalo (Singapore), IM Han (Malaysia), Liu Yu (Malaysia), Nufo Indonesia), Wahyudi (Indonesia), Zhe Wei Lip (Malaysia)

By Ray Lauren

HO CHI MINH—Grandmaster Eugene Torre got stalled but the Philippines boosted its chances for the team gold after Round 7 of men's mainland chess in the 22nd Southeast Asian Games here.

Torre missed the winning line and settled for a draw against Vietnam IM Pham Minh Hoang. He dropped to second place behind Indonesian GM Utut Adianto, who had 6.5 points, to half-behind play.

"I could have won with the 'Rb7' move," said the 53-year-old Torre after the post-game analysis. He is presently 0.5 points.

Two other Filipinos—IM Mark Paragua and GM Joey Antonio—gained ground, even as GM Rong Yilianayee and IM Ronald Dalikit stayed in contention and pushed the Philippines ahead of Indonesia and Vietnam in team competition.

The 19-year-old Paragua, the rapid individual winner, beat Malaysian IM Wai Farfoulhim, to climb to 6 points while Antonio regained to 4.5 following a victory over Indon IM Liu Indo.

Villanueva and Dalikit led the 4-quintuan after downing their matches against fastpick Sirswan-ak and Singaporean GM Wa-Shin Ho, respectively.

Vietnam joins the team event with 21 points while RP and Indonesia are tied for second at 16.5.

8TH TRACK GOLD

Ballester takes over as marathon champion

BALLESTER flashes the No. 1 sign as he crosses the finish line in Hanoi's main stadium. JOHN BACDAYAN

By Ernesto Gonzales

HANOI—Allen Ballester took over as marathon champion from Roy Vence Friday to give athletics a redeeming final victory at the close of the campaign on the 22nd Southeast Asian Games here.

The 29-year-old Ballester from Surigao City improved on his silver finish two years ago in Malaysia by pulling away from Vietnamese Nguyen Chi Dung to win in two hours 21 minutes and three seconds.

Nguyen was second in 2:21:31 while Thailand's Soonthon Jandacha took the bronze in 2:23:35.

Vence, 37, donned none of his old marathon tile and came home fifth.

Florabella Cachero failed in the final kilometer and ruined the bronze in the women's marathon won by Indonesia's Ferial Ghufron in 2:38:28.

It was the first international victory and the second since the Manila Marathon last June for Ballester, who clinched the eighth gold for the highly regarded Filipino squad that blew what looked like three sure wins on Thursday.

Although stained by the reported marathon win that allowed the Filipinos to vanish their golden fiascoes in Malaysia, athletics president Go Teng Kok said he had a sleepless night on the successive hours of John Lozada, Elizabeth Buenaventa and the men's 4 x 400-meter relay team on what should have been a glorious Thursday hours of then.

"Medalya na sanang pa-ang marito ko (It was a bad day and I ran out of luck)," moaned the controversial head of the top gold medal machine of the RP contingent known popularly as OTB.

While the Philippines was anointed with nine golds two years ago, the last victory came long after the Games had ended as the Thai winner in the men's javelin was disqualified for failing the dope test and Cassidy Delacruz was elevated to first place.

"Iama may sasabak sa' ay (I hope another athlete nails the 6-hope test," added Go hopes.

Training sessions, OTB said, he was accepting full responsibility for his team's failure to fulfill its mission of 30-32 golds this time, although he added there was room to believe on the part of Buenaventa and the relay team.

With a seventh gold secured after Israel Borromeo's win in men's hammer throw, Go said he told Philippine Sports Commission chair Eric Buhain to stay around at the Southeast Seaghes and be ready for the awarding ceremonies.

But the expected gold-gold-gold turned to two silvers-three-silver finish.

First, John Lozada, already a winner in the men's 200-meters, lost his 400-meter title as one of the two Vietnamese runners, who gunned up on him, bit the Filipino's lead with his spiked shoe going into the last 150 meters. Lozada struggled home third running with a battered shoe.

Filipinos mired in 5th with 41 golds

From page A12

The eighth gold matched the country's athletics total two years ago although association president Jo Teng Kok, who had predicted 18-32 victories this time, continued to say the unexpected losses of defending champion John Lozada (400 meters), Eduardo Buenaventa (5,000m) and the highly respected 4x400-relay team Thursday.

With the country's top pin points ending up with just two silvers, mountain biker Quinones pulled through in the 25-km cross country event, with Frederick Feliciano placing third to match an earlier bronze by Marlon Bible in the women's division.

The men's basketball team shoots for the gold tomorrow against Malaysia in the Ho Chi Minh where the Filipinos are also in gold contention in traditional rival after seven rounds.

The pamangkadores led in the team race while Grandmaster Eugene Torre was overtaken by Indonesia's Utut Adianto for first.

Wushak also gripped for the gold and settled for three of the duo's eight silvers—Christopher Yabut landed 59 kg), Emmanuel Dinon (under 65) and Larry Gerral (under 90). Wrestling also produced two runners-up in Violeta Agustin in the bench pin under-48 kg and Jimmy Segues in the under-86 class.

Rivero's victory actually prevented a gold shutout for taekwondo as Dindo Stimpas settled for the silver in the men's heavyweight division and women's flyweight Eva Marie Dimaano had to contest herself with the bronze. Another mixed entry, Tibaster Go, was eliminated by Thailand's U Surchinsiriwo in his first match in the men's flyweight division.

Another taekwondo silver was contributed by Alexander Intemen in the welterweight class last Thursday.

After claiming a silver Thursday evening was Rey Gradeza in the cadet 47/51 canoes singles with teammate Emilio Villarita taking the bronze earlier in the same event.

The marching events in boxing, fin swimming, shooting, triple takraw, traditional boat racing and wushu are scheduled Saturday before the closing ceremony in the evening at the National Stadium.

THE RP team grips the Malaysian crew for the bronze medal in the 12-man traditional boat race in Hanoi's West Lake.

Cagers seeking 5-game sweep

HO CHI MINH—Starting from there a sweep.

Even with the basketball title virtually in the bag, RP-Coleman Distiller intends to finish with a flourish against Malaysia at 11 a.m. (11 noon in Manila) Saturday in the 22nd Southeast Asian Games here.

The Filipinos won their first four games and, following the Malaysians' 79-74 loss to the Thais Saturday, are solid favorites to cartwhe the crown they've held since 1991.

The Filipinos can afford to lose by 20 points and still emerge champions via the tie-breaks. But for coach Aric del Rosario, that would be unacceptable.

Alarmed by his squads' unimpressive win over the Indons, 75-70, Thursday night, Del Rosario cancelled a per-agreed free day.

"We can't afford to relax," said the 61-year-old Del Rosario, who ordered practice at 4 p.m. Afterwards, Del Rosario and assistant coaches Boyet Zamar and Dong Vergara went to review the tape of the Thailand-Malaysia game.

They studied the individual movements and the plays of the Malaysians, who are being handled by American Johns Seales.

"Classic moving midcourt zone," Vergara said. (We want to finish it well)," Vergara said.

"To do that, we need to create their (physical) level of intensity." Ray Lauren

Cagebelles go...

From page A13

ry over the Thais.

Malaysia, next to create its crowning with its 4-0 record, handles Thailand in the summer of women's play at 1 p.m.

Even if the cohesive Malaysians lose their last game, they would still finish on top as they have beaten both the Singaporeans (83-65) and the Filipinas (65-54).

Coach Ian Grandell's charges are bidding to improve on their bronze medal finish in the 2001 Busta Lumpur SEAG.

Basketball Association of the Philippines secretary general Gaston Lim, DBP Chairman Rico Geruel were Tony Publico are in town to provide moral support to the Filipinas and the RP-Coleman Distiller team. Ray Lauren

Formula for 2005

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mercadejas

I'd say the Philippines exhibited a superb sporting gesture in 1981 when it did not exploit its home court advantage to win the overall crown. That year, we could only place third behind champion Indonesia and Thailand when we could have easily won the overall crown. And we chose to play it gracefully the way most host countries of the event usually do it.

And what would they show their greed? Simple. The host country will choose disciplines that will put them in the biggest chances to win the golds. That's because unlike the Olympics or Asian Games, the SEA Games rules allow that. That is Vietnam, golf and bowling, disciplines the Vietnamese do not much indulge in and therefore are games not gold-rich for them, have been struck out. That is why they have become hosts in the Singaporeans (83-65) and the Filipinas (65-54).

What's more, Vietnam, as host, had the latitude to insert in events that their neighbors do not play, like fin swimming, a gold mine but which is virtually Greek to most SEA Games participants.

In just two days of action, Vietnam, fourth overall in 2001 when Malaysia was its first season while hosting the event in Kuala Lumpur, swept into the lead and, with barely a day left in the Games, appeared a sure winner with its haul of 82 golds. Thailand was a far second with 60 golds, while Indonesia third at 54, Malaysia fourth at 38 and the Philippines fifth at 26.

We will be lucky if we end up fourth overall as we are still short of 14 golds to our target of 40 golds.

When we host the Games anew in 2005, I suggest that we include spa, pahinis and bowling pins in the calendar. That way, we might finally win our first overall crown after entering the 1991 title by a single gold to Indonesia. We failed to include boxing there as that's why.

To really ensure our victory in 2005, I have an idea borne out of Vietnam's fin swimming event, whatever that is. And 10 days in 2005, let's include boxing. The opposition can't complain because we are not breaking a Games rule. But if they insist, let them be.

They'd end up anyways hashing up the wrong ones.

That's because The Philippines joined the Games in 1977; it hosted the event in 1981 and 1991 and will do it again in 2005.

TAKEN Erwin Bonifacio sheds tears of joy after being proclaimed winner of the women's featherweight finals (welterweight in Ho Chi Minh's Phu Tho Stadium. She beat Malaysia's Cho Chee Chun, 5-3. Helping him (after her win) is companion Veronica Domingo, gold medalist in the lightweight class. (PHOTO BY JOEY MENDOZA)

Brave RP jin gets his revenge

By Ray Lustre

HO CHI MINH—Every time Dan Alberto Mark sees the 9-inch scar below his right knee and feels the metal plate inside, his unbreakable vows.

On November 9 two years ago, facing Tan Mulia Lanjaan Southeast Asian Games taekwondo competitor, and he was fighting Vietnamese Phan Tan Tai in the semifinals division.

Dan unleashed a vicious kick on Mark's leg and saw a web of pain into the Filipino's brain.

Mark's shin was broken and the leg had to be put in a plaster cast on the flight home. Then it had to be operated on, and Mark was on a crutch for four months.

When he returned to competition, he used the incident to serve as inspiration. He knew that he'd cross paths again with Dan.

That's why when they found each other in the final Thursday night, the 5-foot-11 Mark wanted revenge.

The Parisenos proved a tough nut to crack though and led 3-4 in their one cut. Little did Dan know that he'd be deducted two points from the four warnings coach each and a point he got for stepping out of the line.

As soon as the bout ended, Mark jumped to give for he knew about the warnings' implications.

Exasperated, Dan slammed his headgear on the floor. He also released Mark's handshake.

Tshigong power was Head on eye abs Emanuel is clear for it's as typical of him. He also refused any handshake during the dope-test, "and he deserves gruel-

ing," said the thirteen grader.

Alberto is from Dasmariñas Elementary School in Cavite City. He is a student at the University of Santo Tomas.

After the fight, you couldn't see the anger in Mark's eyes anymore.

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Call for change

EDITORIAL

SINCE his resignation as finance secretary on Nov. 30, Jose Isidro Camacho has been too inhibited in revealing the severe fiscal crisis that is gripping the country.

Camacho's resignation sent the peso tumbling relative to the US dollar, reflecting the market's anxieties over the government's ability to control the swelling deficit and total debt. Since then, Camacho has generated more shock waves by speaking more than just about the deficit and putting what he calls the "fiscal crisis" in the context of the political system, which is ill-suited to cope with the crisis.

It would be too shallow to consider Camacho's devastating critique as a protodictatorial ouzel, as the adherents to the values of the 1987 Constitution would have it, because of exhaustion. His criticism is an indictment in broad brush strokes of a system in which the government of President Macapagal-Arroyo is embedded and which has hampered efforts to carry out reasonable reforms.

Although during his watch, Camacho failed to curb the deficit, he can now speak with authority, informed by his frustrations in pushing reforms in the system of taxation. It is because of this fact that Camacho's criticism should be heeded seriously.

Camacho fittingly made his critique before the Philippine Economic Society. In that forum, some of the leading economists of the country joined him in criticizing the political system. Camacho called for an overhaul not just of the fiscal sector but of the entire economy, warning that "time is running out for the Philippines, a country that is lurching in semidelirium from both the foreign as well as local markets."

His concerns found echoes in the assessment of Gerardo Sicat, professor at the UP School of Economics and head of the National Economic and Development Authority during the Marcos administration, as well as that of Felipe Medalla, also a UP economics professor and former head of Neda during the Estrada administration. The economy, said Sicat, "is drifting with no clear destination in sight." Medalla painted a grim picture of investment in the country, saying that foreign direct investments coming from Japan and China prefer to go to Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia over the Philippines.

From a macro-economic point of view, Camacho said that the country's huge debt, which has reached nearly P3.5 billion, was "causing a sense of concern." He assured, however, that "we will not go under," explaining further by saying, "We are in a fiscal crisis because we've got this large deficit which compromises our expenditures."

That said, Camacho shifted his criticism toward the political system. "We have to change our political system," he declared. "We need to change our political leaders and bring back credibility, trust and sympathy and people who believe in who are leading us." He took Congress to task for failing to pass key economic bills such as the reclassification of beer and tobacco taxes designed to boost revenue collection by P14 billion. "We have a very high debt that is not sustainable unless we do something," he said, "and right now there is something wrong with our political systems. It is too slow and it is not equipped to deal with this kind of problem."

Camacho said the swelling deficit underlined the need to improve tax collection and for Congress to act on a number of tax reforms. Both Camacho and Medalla criticized the tariff and taxation structure that provides incentives to certain sectors, including the exemptions from the 10 percent value-added tax given to lawyers as well as movie actors.

Several tax reform bills have encountered strong resistance in Congress, especially with elections scheduled in 2004. Congressmen are hostile to new and increased taxes which are unpopular. But Medalla reminded the politicians that "the economy must swallow bitter medicine."

It is a sign of his frustration with the political system that Camacho was prompted to call the change in the political system. He went so far as to say that two extremists offer attractive alternatives to the present gridlock-prone system: a shift to a unicameral parliamentary structure and a highly centralized state vesting the President with strong powers to push reforms.

The business forum provided a stage for refocusing public debate from sterile political discussions centering on presidential aspirations for 2004 to more serious economic concerns. The economists' call for radical change in the political system is widely shared in the economic and business sectors.

Respect the campaign ban

SEPARATE OPINION

Joaquin A. Cruz

IN 1907 Congress passed Republic Act No. 4880 limiting the campaign period to 120 days before the date of the election for candidates elected to hope and 90 days for all other candidates. Challenged as violative of freedom of expression, it barely survived a declaration of unconstitutionality for lack of just one justice of the Supreme Court to complete the then needed majority vote.

The rule has since been entrenched in subsequent election laws until it only a modification of the length of the original periods. Under BA 7166, the campaign period for the President, Vice President and Senators is 90 days before the date of the election and 45 days for members of the House of Representatives and local elective officials. Campaigning outside those periods is prohibited.

The purpose of the prohibition is to provide for a more even playfield except during the allowed campaign periods to the people, especially the public elective officials, can devote their attention to the problems of the country without the distractions of partisan politics and personal ambition. So often in the past were the objectives stymied, particularly by defeated candidates, some of whom resumed their campaigns for the next election as soon after their rejection at the polls just concluded.

This objective has been largely ignored, however, through obvious subterfuges that undoubtedly could be exposed under the strict interpretation of the prohibition. There are even not widely apparent even now although the next election is never to be held until 2007. Many prospective candidates have already started their respective campaigns in mockery of the law they are supposed to obey and, in the case of executive officials, enforce.

Chief among these violators is no less than the President of the Philippines who is constitutionally obligated to "ensure that the laws be faithfully executed."

As of two weeks ago, President Macapagal-Arroyo was reported to have so far made 327 provincial trips since she changed her mind and reneged on her promise not to run in the 2004 presidential election. The action was supposedly made on official business and flew clear at public expense. She was accompanied by some of her aides and members of the media as well, who all also travelled on taxpayers' money.

You may be sure that during these official visits, her staff dutifully maintained the people that GMA was in the running again and no longer bore de aerobics as before.

If there's any doubt about her intentions, there are those unfortunate radio and television announcements for tolaxin. She claims she has improved water transportation from Luzon to Mindanao for the creation of the passenger and cargo conveniences in the shipping of cargo, especially foodstuffs. She has likewise used distribution of land certificates to illegal occupants of public property, the grounds by said they were "no longer squatters" by virtue of her generosity. In another commercial, a soldier's family is ecstatic over his acquisition of a house through his benign concern, and the father and his son gratefully salute their commander in chief.

To be fair, though, let it not be said that President Macapagal is the only one violating the campaign prohibition. In fact, all the other presidential candidates are following the lead, as and also prematurely and illegally campaigning. Raul Roco has been traveling all over the country calling it his administration, his campaign slogan is the relentless campaign speeches. Panfilo Lacson entered his name with his privileged speech against Jose Pidal and his dubbed his Labaw ng Bonds-relating Filipino president Edgardo Angara for supporting Fernando Poe Jr. Atty. Petitio Sison his first censure in the Honasan Hotel and adopted the silly slogan "Together, Each Achieving More," which made her forever-old grandaughter Cara Laugh Ilora Lores Legarda, the of the Inchcliffe commercial, is reputing to be the running mate of whatever will accept her.

Taking their cue from their elders, the local officials are also trying to enhance their own image. The mayors of Silver Klouds have advised their respective cities with their name projects, new, lighted straight, of course, also at public expense. Governors are simultaneously now from perspective office seekers carrying the innocent message of Tolentin cities that translates to "vote for me." Curiously, Mayor Joey Marquez's campaign gimmick, for whatever position he is running, probably as Governor General of Tirol, is unconfirmed projects on Pacalupan City.

Voluntary are further warned that the campaign period begins only on Feb. 11, 2004, for the President, Vice President and Senators and on March 27, 2004, for members of the House of Representatives and local officials. Until then, prominent candidates, hold your horses and respect the law.

How's our English?

GET REAL

Sylvia Colayco-Montemal

THE PHILIPPINES is the third largest English-speaking country in the world, after the United States and the United Kingdom. That's what it says in practically all the books about our country. One even goes so far as to say that almost 72 percent of our people (or roughly 70 million) is "fluent" in English.

"Fluent." I looked the word up in the dictionary, just to make sure that it means what I thought it means. It is defined as "achieving facility in or command of something"; "speaking or writing with ease[ly, easily or readily]." And from the evidence of my own eyes and ears, it is doubtful if 30 million of our countrymen, or, claimed, meet that criterion.

A recent e-mail from businessman-golfer Jose Yuipco, with a list of some examples of how the language gets butchered, is illuminating. "I couldn't care a damn." "What's your sure done before this?" "Don't touch my cool." "Hello! It's a bible, whose being yourself." "It's spilled milk under the bridge." "For the years a boy anymore! You're a man anymore!"

Even in the larger multinational companies, the operation after the first, very smooth "hi-and-se corporation, Good Morning?" will switch to Filipino when the caller says something other than the expected request to be connected to some office. Radio and TV stations are barraged each generating calls and texts when commentators and talk show hosts speak in English. So I don't know where those 30 million people are.

And neither, it seems, do call-center firms who seem to hire people fluent in spoken English in the Metro Manila area. Business Processing Association informs us that out of every 100 applicants for call-center open slots at the Technical Center Region—and there are thousands of them, because every level, pay is P15,000 a month, plus overtime for evening and weekend work—only five pass the written test. The applicants do fine at first as the aptitude part is concerned, but spoken English is another matter altogether. Regional accents on not the problem, says Bautista, because those are relatively easy to correct. The problem is that 95 percent of the applicants have difficulty both in understanding what is asked, and in communicating the answer if they understood the question.

Surprisingly (because we in the MOR think we can hold our own in everything), call centers find Cebu and Davaoeños relatively more facility learning proficiency for English fluent operators. That is why they are beginning to locate in those areas, rather than in the NCR. The main point, however, is that in the "flood tagged English-speaking country," there is a shortage of English fluent speakers. Which means that even as globalizing world, we are losing an important competitive edge. Job opportunities are being lost. It is not a thousand problems but a supply one.

And if you think that the call-center industry is an exception, think again. Business issues our number bombshell: Filipino nurses who want to work in the United States (which apparently needs 400,000 more nurses) have an difficulty handling the nursing exams. They have the requisite technical skills, and of course's best patient skills are almost impeccable. But they fail—again—in the language proficiency. Only 10 percent pass the so-called TSE, the Test of Spoken English.

Of course, the current love is the country's gear. But that is beside the point. The point is that, as a country, we are losing our preferences in English, and the opportunities that go with familiarity with the global lingua franca. Simply by the third-largest English-speaking country in the world, but, as Cesar Bautista says, Bautista's husband, says, we are on the way down while the countries are going up to be in English is concerned.

It is not difficult to enumerate the possible factors behind the "de-English-ing" of the Philippines. First was a misplaced nationalism that even hailed from speaking English as a conqueror's tongue, because it was reflective of a colonial mentality. (It goes to any readers, Indonesia and Malaysia left the same way.) Then there was the series of decisions by benighted media to use Filipino as their medium of instruction, to the point where even eminent English TV programs from abroad have been dubbed in the vernacular (where a joke loses all foresight—using Filipino subtitles), or even using English subtitles for the dubbed-in-Filipino programs—would have helped keep us more improve our English, although).

Then what with the continuing decline in the quality of our educational systems, by summer we will not discuss at this time. Add the fact that our overseas workers are more proficient in English than the colleagues they have left behind. That factor in the benign GSIS demand for our teachers, which has resulted in the shortening of most of the ranks of our teachers, as they follow the lure of salaries at least 10 times what they earn here. There you have it.

But the good news is that at last the Philippine government has recognized the problem, with President Macapagal-Arroyo "directing the Department of Education to retain English as primary medium of instruction." Better late than never. Others who did so shouldn't realize Thailand, China and even Myanmar are actively pursuing English proficiency in their education systems. How better news to find the private sector—the American Chamber of Commerce, the UP-Ayala Business Council, people like Bautista—is bringing it final.

Already, I feel better.

Pinoys network globally

A SIGNIFICANT convention opens Monday, Dec. 15, at the PICC on Roxas Boulevard and continues until Thursday, Dec. 18. Called the "Second Global Filipino Networking Convention," the event will put Filipinos overseas, hailed as the "new heroes" of the country, on center stage. The overseas Filipino have been a potent force by the width of the economic and its survival in the short to medium term, earning an estimated $8 billion to $10 billion annually, Felipe Miranda, Pulse Asia chief, in a recent briefing for business chiefs, pointed out that the overseas program accounts for 7 percent of the country's gross domestic product, providing no existing company here has matched.

The gathering comes as the nation is caught up with the election fever, and the question that inevitably comes to mind is whether there is an overseas Filipino vote. Miranda, who is not politically active, just is there is a youth vote, a labor vote and in a certain degree a women's vote, and all these can be used by candidates for projection.

* * *

At the conference's nerve impulses, the "Invalid, power-packed" Second Global Filipino Networking Convention is expected to enable Filipinos from all over the globe to network with each other, share their success stories, knowledge, experiences, resources and contacts, according to Presidential Adviser on Overseas Filipino Communities Mohagher Iqbal. Iqbal who is also conference honorary chair. Rivaled that the 1998 phenomenon presently "the challenges of creating a new self-image of the 'Global Filipino' who is a positive factor in the development of many nations and in the growth of the Philippines." Perhaps, the Filipino overseas should do more for his country if he can network with other overseas Pinoys. Thus, the theme of this convention is "A Homecoming: A Renewal, the Blossoming of Opportunities."

* * *

Some 4,000 Filipino overseas from the business, health and medicine, tourism, sports and entertainment sectors are expected to attend this second networking conference (the first was held in San Francisco, California last year). Timed for the location season of the "Pinoy Christmas," a self-enable overseas Pinoys not only to reunite with their families and friends but also to organize. Organizers say that the event will also help in the development of their provinces. It will also give them the opportunity to catch up on issues and developments here, especially those affecting their industries and the Overseas Absentee Voting Act and the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act. The program includes a keynote address from the President and the swearing in of the "New" Filipino" officers-to-be. Iqbal's counterpart in the U.S., Ambassador Ed Ermita, on the "need to foster greater unity among Pinoys worldwide, amid a world divided by social, economic and political problems."

* * *

To ensure its success and in recognition of the "important contributions that could be expected from overseas Filipinos if properly linked and empowered," as GMA put it, she issued Executive Order 304 creating a policy and executive coordinating body for the events, chaired by Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon and co-chaired by Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas, with Foreign Secretary Blas Ople and Interior Secretary Joey Lina as members. Representing the private sector are former Tourism Secretary Alma Gabor, Alex Tuchinsky, Rodel Sodio, Marvic Sandico and Enrique Ayuso.

And now it is the time of this big gathering has moved from the huge annual remittances of overseas Filipinos to how they can help their country and their hometowns, in terms of technical skills and expertise acquired or honed abroad as well as projects that help upgrade the lives of their provincemates, such as scholarships for poor families. The overseas Chinese, especially our true Chinese, are the latest to emphasize this caring for the homeland, helping educate homemates in China with development programs. Filipino overseas cannot do less.

* * *

This week, the charming ambassador of India, Narendra Sharma, invited me and three other media colleagues to the new branch of Prince of Jaipur at the Global City in Fort Bonifacio. Prince of Jaipur, which is rich in Indian art, lamps and art objects, the restaurant gives that ambiance of a sheik's palace. Lunch was a culinary experience, featuring delicious northern Indian cuisine such grilled lamb, beef, chicken and vegetarian and all the biryani and naan. Ambassador Sharma promised a culinary tour of the Indian south next time.

The Star's CEO Bobcat, the most avid media advocate of the parliamentary form of government, queried me about India's own experience. She replied that India presents the best model for study here, instead of the more dreaded Spanish accretion, since economic and political reforms are now the order of the day, and country from those obtaining here. This is a good segue question for Speaker Jose de Venecia and the politicians during the negotiations to consider.

I recalled to the Indian envoy how her own country's experience in enactment of counter-insurgent laws, including the infamous Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was finally repealed in 2002 after India celebrities, and she said with a smile that it's still true even now but the good thing is that with the parliamentary system, celebrities can express their opinions and cannot aspire for high national offices.

The ambassador also pointed out that India is methodological in its computer software field, but is now also venturing into hardware manufacture. She noted that its $2 billion pharmaceutical industry began as a "copycat" industry vis-a-vis Western pharmaceutical firms, but after two decades it is venturing into research and development in earnest to be able to produce cheaper medicines of its own billion people.

* * *

HERE'S good news to make us Pinoys proud:

The Vatican has just announced the appointment of Bishop Jose Oscar Mumfort Bermudez, auxiliary bishop in the large archdiocese of Los Angeles, as the new archbishop of the city of San Fernando, the first Filipino-American to be named to a diocese in the United States.

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Music ushers in Christmas

SUCCESS... Perhaps it's fair-sweeping to usher in the Christmas season for me through music.

Every while my husband and I were still in Baguio on our way to the city, I got a call from Nina Nieves asking if we wanted to watch a "Christmas Concert" that evening. Nina, the CSP-Ada Hay Trade and Cultural Center, the concert had been organized for the second year in a row, with organizers hoping this will be the start of an annual tradition in the city.

The concert combines the talents of three of Baguio's top choirs: the United Church of Christ in the Philippines' "Hill" Music Ministry, the St. Louis University Glee Club and the Baguio Cathedral Choir, under the baton of Ramon Tapaya.

Under the direction of facilitator John Decastro, the Baguio Church started the Christmas story through song, including a little known hymn "Mary Had a Baby," which tells the story from Mary's point of view, the Blessed Mother's view when she saw the Angel of the Annunciation her yes to God's challenge to bear the Savior. Did she know she would lose Him so early in life, and that He would be taken away? Did she know that she would have a sword-like wound in her own her and humanity?

Indeed, the real beginning of the Christmas tale is not the birth of the Christ Child in the manger, or the worship of angels and shepherds, but the hopes of the small nation in Nazareth, when a young maiden consented to be the mother of the Son of God and thereby set humanity on the road to salvation.

The second part of the concert featured beloved Christmas carols, from the traditional "Feliz Navidad" to "Away in a Manger" and "Bring on Pasko" to pop classics like Sixto Cayabyab's "Kumukutikutitap" and the very romantic "Kung Gagawin Mo Ang Sabihin."

TWO Baguio-based singers, soprano Cherry Blossom Pangilinan and tenor John Hector Sanchez filled the hall with traditional carols during the intermission. Their numbers reminded the audience of the origins of Christmas and its segment of their religious roots and solemn intent.

Clearly, the audience knew the singers (the soloists and the chorale members both) and welcomed them cheerfully starting with warmth and homegrown appreciation.

I can only hope that indeed the Christmas Chorale becomes an annual tradition for Baguio, which, despite its growing population and emergence as a bustling metropolis in the mountains, remains, out of the tourist season, a small town where people still know each other.

Though Christmas is celebrated all over the Philippines and wherever around the city, Christmas in Baguio feels more subdued and less commercial than in the metropolis. Perhaps the chilly air puts people in the mood for intimacy, for encountering (and remembering!) others in the company of loved ones. Whatever the reason, Baguio at this time of year provides a peaceful respite from the stresses of the season, breathing space before the long year-end rat-race starts in the—it's frenzy of holiday-making.

* * *

BUT back to chilly info who even in this quiet city. We woke up Friday morning and were startled to learn that a robbery had occurred in the building on Session Road, now killed in a fire that broke out in a nightclub along Magsaysay Avenue Thursday morning.

Hyperbaric killed were across that the ways on, who had called it a day at four that morning, were "so happy" the night before, looking forward to finding a lucrative contract, with one dancer happily visiting plans to send money home to her mother.

The Pica-pica Nightclub, where the night died, is a pure-and, was located in the basement of a commercial building, and other workers who went to rescue the dancers said they couldn't find their way through the club's concrete hallways and dark passages. The fire exit was also said to have been blocked by a refrigerator.

The fire is the downside of the development of Baguio, again pointing to the need for better planning and zoning, for proper vigilance on the part of local authorities and by strict application of the building code. Beautiful and peaceful as it is, Baguio is still a fragile environment, and it will take every one's cooperation to make sure that it remains a safe and secure city for everyone, visitor and resident alike.

* * *

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Things useful to know

SOMETIMES when you think it's all a waste of time, someone writes to inform you that you, they're listening and here are a couple of things you and others may want to know.

Next time you need an itinerary of sorts for your hobbyhorse relatives or friends, like Dolores of Saraya, Quezon, has some suggestions. Its names here "national" Manila may be to compatriots in the Southeast Asian region, but for locals "there are fairly quite number of heritage sojourn-sorties to examine in the Southern Tagalog area.

Alaitan, historical landmarks, private and government can museums scattered around." My only complaint is that there is no mention of museums to celebrate all or only some of those are worth visiting. These include the Mabini Shrine, the Miguel Malvar Historical Landmark, the Leon Apacible Historical Landmark, the Manuela Agoncillo Historical Landmark, the Emilio Aguinaldo Historical Shrine in Cavite, the Tagaytay Underground Cemetery in Tagaytay, Laguna, and the Hermano Pule Shrine and the Casa Segunda (I'm not sure where these last two are located).

Among the museums he mentions are Villa Escudero, which is also shortage museum like no other in the whole Philippines" (Truong, Quezon) and the De la Salle Museum in Bustos(the Cavite). "A very beautiful lifestyle museum, this is... dedicated to the preservation of certain aspects and material culture of the 19th century Philippine (mestizo) friends." There is, as well, Ole Mop Silvio Archbishop Museum (one not to go to) "which showcases the religious artifacts of the Saraya Museum is a small repository of a community's socio-cultural, historical and religious heritage in the oldest house in town. Government can museums in Quezon include the Casa de Comunidad in Tayabas, restored by the NHI and housing a library and an exhibition area on the 2nd floor; the Museo ng Banagan, the Museo ng Lipa and the Villa Museum in Lagonoy (Camarines Sur), a museum of an old school building with artifacts the being oceanic excavated from an earlier town site called Binagbag.

Now departing from things cultural, here's an e-mail from a friend to take your mind off certain many subjects none of us can do anything about (in the meantime anyway).

20 THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE LEARNED BY MIDDLE AGE

1. If you're too open-minded, your brains will fall out.

2. Don't worry about what people think; they don't do it very often.

3. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in the garage makes you a car.

4. Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity.

5. My idea of housework is to sweep the room with a glance.

6. Not one shred of evidence supports the notion that life is serious.

7. For every action, there is an equal and opposite government program.

8. If you look like your passport picture, you definitely need the trip.

9. A conclusion is the point where either all of your ideas end or good.

10. Eat well, stay fit, die anyway.

11. Men are from earth. Women are from earth. Deal with it.

12. No man has ever been shot while doing the dishes.

13. A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.

14. Middle age is when broadness of the mind and narrowness of the waist change places.

15. Opportunities always look bigger going than coming.

16. Junk is something you've kept for years and throw away three weeks before you need it.

17. Nothing is always any more believable than you counted on.

18. Experience is a wonderful thing. It enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.

19. Time shall not weigh more than my valley crushed on it.

20. If you must choose between two evils, pick the one you've never tried before.

Sense and Sensibility is written by Nanette L. Harper.

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Nanette L. Harper

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Young Blood

Ivyline Vincent D. Bernardino

In The News

Raul Rece

The INQUIRER is a member of the PHILIPPINE PRESS INSTITUTE

Changes must be made in the Constitution

With a reaction to Carlendo L. Dee (Other) letter, "We're simply not ready for change." (PDI, 11/29/05)

For his information, in the ongoing work, deep-as charter change, one amendment to judicial power steadily sought is to delete a passage under Section 1, Article VIII of the Constitution.

It reads: "And to determine whether or not there has been a grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction on the part of any branch or instrumentality of the Government."

There's no doubt that when former Chief Justice Roberto Concepcion authored that provision, he had nothing but the best of intentions. Unfortunately, there are members of the judiciary and lawyers alike who see the provision as an opportunity to pursue nefarious ends.

If a surround were kept, it would show that the provision is resorted to more often for unfavorable than for quick (it was solely intended). The provision has become an access to even lenient judges to encroach into economic and business questions they're not competent of adjudicate.

Economic losses due to delays of implementing contracts and their ripple effects have stunted our economic development. Lost investors, lay-offs and jobs that would've been created but were lost due to temporary restraining orders (TROs) based on the provision are samples of its modifying effects.

The country's economic growth without that provision surely would have been higher than it is today even less than possible.

It's often said Filipinos are resourceful and have a propensity of just dig up but ever against things that may or may not happen without realizing the barriers could cause severe adversities than those to be prevented.

There are several other constitutional flaws similar to that provision in terms of economic losses the nation continues to suffer. That's why charter change has become imperative if we were to halt the country's slide into the political and economic quagmire that some Latin American nations have fallen into. Recent examples are Venezuela (the world's fifth oil-exporting country) and Bolivia, which our leaders severely don't want the Philippines to follow.

As to December's question about what's wrong with the presidential form of government, citing the United States where it's doing very well, let's take it from Lee Kuan Yew. Lee told local businessmen in 1992, "Do not compare the Philippines with the United States. The latter has limitless expanse of territory, a vast wealth and natural resources, and an incomparable industrial power."

—FRANK PONCE DE LEON
IG Bindunan Ave.,
Quezon City

LETTERS

A proper parliamentary system for us

THIS has reference to the column of Atty. Howard Eddie "Parliamentary could be the killer." (PDI, 11/8/05) Howard's comments are a classic example of an ill-informed commenting on an issue not sufficiently thought-out by some, uncalculated, with less or no prejudice.

Howard opines that the current Executive impeachment case "would benefit however any lingering illusion that a parliamentary system is the answer to the problems of our country," referring to a combination of the presidential and parliamentary system along the French line.

In the first place, except for some legislators, nobody seriously advocates the French parliamentary model, which is the most complicated and should be adopted by the country. We are like because the French model splits executive power between the president and the prime minister who will be super always to the active individual in control of the people, through popular election and through legislative and accredited people's and non-governmental organizations representing the people at large.

The people under the system we advocate shall have the power to dissolve the parliament the moment it becomes apparent—and not later—that it no longer serves their best interests. However, such power has to be restrained by a non-partisan head of state, elected by the people at large from a pre-selected list of eligible statesmen with the appropriate experience and qualifications and with unquestionable integrity. It is a system that encompasses the best features of the English, Italian, Filipinos, Germans and other models, with adaptations based on our own national values and abuses/creatures.

Perhaps, what the current impeachment imbroglio should teach/illustrate is not a thumbs-down on our judicial system but rather that we should not be enthralled to the politicians in Congress, but to duly elected and non-partisan representatives of the people, who could be done if Congress would accept a law providing for the election of such delegates to be convened as a constitutional convention soon after the May 2004 elections, who will come up with a new constitution within a period of no longer than one year. The new system of government should be installed within one year from the ratification of the new constitution.

Secondly, who said that "a parliamentary system is the answer to the problems of the country"? The parliamentary system is the key to the solution of the problems of our country. It is not the concerned citizens of the country, who will solve our current problems with the ballot, or through the appropriate parliamentary system.

—ALEJANDRO (ADING)
executive dean,
Sulong Pilipino,
manager
no dewey.net

Smart strives to be a good corporate citizen

IN REGARD of Inner Communications, I would like to share with your readers that even after we received a copy of John Siller's e-mail which was featured in the Dec. 12 column of Nina Antonio-Bernal, our company immediately took the initiative to review and evaluate its advertising strategies, taking to heart Siller's inputs.

Smart appreciates feedback from all sectors and immediately processes these inputs with the end in view of becoming a better company in our correspondence with Siller, we advised him and invited him to share more of his ideas with us toward coming out with "creative branding techniques" that would allow us to strike a balance between our advertising objectives and maintaining the inherent beauty of each locality.

Pls likewise inform him that our marketing drive of putting streamers and banners on the roads leading to Baguio was only done in the context of that one specific event, the Ad Congress.

The Ad Congress is an event that primarily honors the marketing and advertising initiatives of the industry. Thus, it is the one event where advertisers such as Smart can highlight its marketing and advertising efforts to the industry as a whole. Thus was so intended to "brand" the trade in the name of communication. One target market were the members of the advertising industry and again, only in the context of the Ad Congress.

It is important to note that local government, theme and events have started to see the value of partnerships and sponsorships with companies like ours. Therefore, we envision having more participation and visibility in local events and celebrations, such as our ongoing partnership with Camp John Hay, as Smart mentioned in her column. Smart's marketing and advertising campaigns are initially agreed upon by the host city or event producer and our company. Smart does not indiscriminately put up merchandising collaterals and advertising materials without the approval, agreement and consent of the proper authorities. Therefore, from our business perspective, there does exist a binding contractual agreement between Smart and the event producers that gives us the authority to engage in such advertising and marketing initiatives. Nonetheless, we will continue our drive to be responsible merchandisers and further raise our benchmark of living up to the highest ideals of advertising ethics.

Rest assured that Smart remains committed to meeting its corporate objectives to enhance its leadership position in the wireless industry, while at the same time continuing to be good corporate citizens of the country.

—RUTH ABUEL
vice president for media
and corporate communications,
Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.,
TD: Dec 11 05 (Sun) 0728

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Maguindanao town launches 'corny' bid for spot in tourism

DIN, Maguindanao—If you can nd a hundred broiled or boiled corns, then you should try joining the second agricultural country corn festival.

"For all the corn you can eat and take a peek," Mayor Rasoul Pendatun said as he posed the challenge to interested corn lovers.

He did not specify what the prize would be but said the corn-eating contest would take place during the town's fiesta celebration on Dec. 19.

Pitong nd250,000 corn (roasted, broiled or boiled)...would be up for consumption by participants.

Pitong said hundreds of people have already registered to join the contest.

He said aside from having fun, contestants and visitors would surely enjoy the town's scenery.

The Maguindanao festival would also showcase the rich and colorful culture of "Bolo-chao," the dominant tribe in the town.

Asked what the aim is in the launching of the town's festival, Pitong said the town's officials have decided that it was time to put the town in the country's tourism map.

"We would like to place our small yet developing town in the map of tourist destinations," he said.

But it is not only the Corn Capital of Maguindanao but also the province's as many as 11 municipalities have their own festivals.

Delay in police revamp opens door to 'jueteng'

BASTIMENTO, Sierra Visayas—While confusion continues to herald a revamp of the Philippine National Police, jueteng lords are taking the opportunity to intensify their operations in this province.

Reports said the confusion has allowed jueteng operations to creep in from the towns' outskirts to the downtown areas, with active cohorts collecting bets using beepers.

Officials expressed concern that jueteng lords are taking advantage of the situation as the province awaits PNP action on the appointment of the province's new police chief.

"It's getting very alarming because the longer we wait for the DILG approval, the more players are coming in at indicating that jueteng has been proliferating," said Gov. Rodolfo Agbayani.

In a letter Dec. 3, Agbayani endorsed to Chief Supt. Jefferson Soriano, Cagayan Valley police director, Senior Supt. Rex Caddali as provincial police chief.

Last month, Senior Supt. Jesus Mendoza was reported to be on the way out as provincial director. Melvin Kinson, PIN Northern Luzon Bureau

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Game 6 = P 500,000 !
Venue : Enchanted Kingdom Bonifacio/ Sta. Rosa Laguna
Date/Time : Dec. 14, 2003, Sunday, 4:30 PM
Ticket : 1,000 good for 4 games
Tickets available at all SM Ticketnet outlets • ATENEO H.S. • Enchanted Kingdom or call 8120934 / 8126499

Capiz folk surprised by Mar confession

By Gavin T. Fadullon
PDI Visayas Bureau

ROXAS CITY—For years, Capiznons had been kept in the dark as to the personal life of the now resigned Trade Secretary and Senate aspirant Manuel "Mar" Roxas II.

To them, Mar is a very private person who has only found love the powerful limelight when his younger brother Gerardo Roy, Gerardo "Bingpay" Roxas Jr. died of a liver ailment in 2001.

To their mind, Mar had not shed a child from any woman and consider the "issue of rights bachelor in town."

Dropping was also rumored to him being a non-existent. It was common knowledge of the prominent Roxas family that Mar's father was not raised to give the youngest Roxas the chance to shed light on if when he was still alive.

The fact that this particular aspect of Mr. life was kept secret apparently did not sit well with his sisters who were only too willing to capitalize on his greater preference.

A lot of Capiznons were taken aback when Roxas, 46, admitted in reporters that he has a son, 10-year-old Mark Gerardo, recently after he resigned from the Cabinet to run for a Senate seat.

The bachelor is a scion of the Araneta-Roxas clan and the grandson of the late President Manuel Roxas from Capiz. He was a congressman in Capiz when he took over the helm post-Cory during the turbulent years of President Joseph Estrada. He resigned shortly before Estrada was removed from power in 2001. He was re-appointed by President Macapagal.

"What Mar had a son? Press release?" was the reaction of Rosario Rojas, 21, a private nurse. "It really came as a surprise not only to me but to a lot of people whom I have talked to."

Whatever Roxas' motive is in publicly acknowledging his son, Gerardo has never only endeared him and earned his respect from his provincemates.

P5M reward did 'Robot' in, says ex-negotiator

ANTI-kidnapping czar Angelo Reyes meets one of seven pilots cited by a kidnapping gang chief after alleged gang leader 'Robot' Hap was killed in a raid in Bacoor on Nov. 20. (PNP PHOTO)

'Chokepoints' in provinces eyed in bid vs kidnaps

THE GOVERNMENT is planning to expand its system of so-called "chokepoints" to the provinces to further tighten the noose around crime syndicates, particularly those into drugs and kidnap-for-ransom gangs.

In a statement, Angelo Reyes, former cabinet secretary and head of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force (Nakaf), said he has ordered his men to study the possibility of setting up checkpoints to strangle crime outside Metro Manila.

"If we are confident of what we are doing, we will respond," he said.

"Metro Manila has been a pilot testing area so we gain more confidence and learn more lessons," he added.

"The anti-kidnapping campaign is a very, very important one."

He said criminal syndicates, especially kidnappers, who fled the base in Metro Manila could move to the provinces where they could find safe havens from law enforcers.

"We will deploy them of that (safe haven in the provinces)," said Reyes in his statement.

The checkpoints were put in place starting on Dec. 1 following a spate of kidnappings in Metro Manila.

While the cases of kidnappings in Metro Manila receive national media attention, Reyes said efforts should also be exerted to deprive the crime syndicates of alternative sites in the provinces where they could continue their underworld operations.

But police work appears to continue to be drastic.

A Davao City court ordered the release of a ranking Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader after police failed to present evidence linking him to heroin-Cocaine bombings.

Mayor Marilanie Sosca said Judge Hed Acosta of the Regional Trial Court Branch 12 in Davao City on Wednesday cleared Hassim Guiamalon alias Commander Eto of responsibility in the March airport and April bus bombings that killed more than 40 persons.

Sosca said Nicanor Faeldi that police have no evidence that Guiamalon and a bombing suspect, Sukarno Diamonding, were one and the same person.

Agents of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Armed in Davao picked up Guiamalon on July 1 to the charges of involuntary-for officials. With a report from Charlie C. Salazar, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Police clear NPAs of Agusan massacre

BUTUAN CITY—Police have cleared the New People's Army (NPA) of involvement in the carnage that left five people dead in a remote village of Lubasfloresta, Agusan del Norte on Nov. 28.

Chief Supt. Alberto Otarlo, regional police chief, said investigators point to a feudal gang as behind the killings.

"Definitely not the NPA," he said.

Seven unidentified men, wearing all masks, indiscriminately fired their M-16 rifles as they barged into a cockpit near in Remedios Cabanlas.

Killed in the attack were Charlito Lacanaza, Gudebaldo Bonilla, Reynito Bobis, Reynito Bonanopan and Jhoras Manansala.

Police earlier said communist rebels were behind the massacre but Otarlo said a band of robberies engaged in feudality was responsible for the killings.

He said the feudal situation was to rob the victims.

In Davao City, the PNP apologized for the "error" committed by its patrollers in an attack in Barangay, Compostela Valley Monday.

Regional Director, cited operatives as, said it was not their intention to harm civilians during the attack.

Sanchez said "our errors become a tragedy for the civilians."

Sanchez said the targets were members of the Special Operations Team of the 10th Infantry Battalion. Franklin M. Caligpid and Anthony T. Alado, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Rebellion raps filed vs NPA cadre in Bohol

By Cris A. Faenza
PDI Correspondent

TAGBILARAN CITY—Police have filed rebellion and illegal possession of firearms charges against a man whom military sources claim is a leading cadre of the New People's Army (NPA) in Bohol.

The complaint against Alberto Manes, allegedly with aliases Bonbon and Dong, was filed before the Tagbilaran City Prosecutor's Office on Monday.

Manes was arrested at dawn Dec. 3 in Sitio Bayong, Mataygay Tawala, Talibon town, based from him were a firearm and commercial documents.

Attached to the complaint was an affidavit of a former rebel whom the police asked not to be identified for security reasons.

In his affidavit, the ex-rebel said Manes used the code "Bonbon" while he was operating in Barangay Bagacay, Ubay town. Manes allegedly used the code "Renzo" while he operated in Barangay Hinopol, Buhiltian town.

2 men, woman killed in drive-by shooting in Davao car wash

DAVAO CITY—At least three persons, including a woman, were killed in a mid-afternoon shooting at a car wash shop in Agdao district here on Wednesday.

Police said Rodel Tangalo, owner of Carmen Carwash Shop, Along Rivera, car wash shop manager, and Herbie Cardenas, were in the shop's office when two men in a black Yamaha 135 motorcycle entered and started shooting. An-thony G. Alfeche, PDI Mindanao Bureau

INQUIRER Visayas

Editor Joe Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Edralyn L. Benedicto

A forgotten Cebuano carol lingers

By Joan L. Mercado
Cebu City

WE'VE put up the wadowad Christmas star parol and belen. We lit the Advent wreath's first purple candle. All bring back memories of singing a hijacked Visayan carol in a Thai church.

At the fanciful Thai-style Holy Redeemer Church on Bangkok's Suan Phalee Lane, Christmas Mass had just ended. Suddenly, the choir leader bolted to his feet. "Before you leave," he told surprised parishioners, "we'll sing for you a Filipino Christmas carol."

The choir then belted out: Ang Pasko ay Sumapit, probably the most popular Filipino carol.

Thais, Swedes, Germans, Nigerians, Americans and others clapped along as the melody rang out: Nang si Herodes ay nabalitaan / Ang pagsilang ng Panginoon ("When Herod got wind / That Christ Jesus came to pay homage").

A few instances (particularly) cured—that they were singing a Tagalog adaptation of the 1902 Cebuano carol, Kinsaysay Ning Kalibutan ("How fruitful is This Season").

A gentle Cebuano composer Vicente Rubi joined dozens the nuns of this days-past 1,000 for a Christmas festival that year. Maricon Weill, another Cebuano, wrote the lyrics.

Forgotten

Today, carolers in Cebu still sing the lilting beat and lyrics that the nuns fluently remembered Rubi and Weill blended 70 years ago. Bukobar ang sugbahay nga giandam ("Beyond the home that candles ring to").

But singing that diaspora in the Bangkok Redemptorist Church was, at least for Visayans familiar with their cultural roots, chicken soup at bittersweet.

At this Christmas eve, who were the Visayans who extolled the original Cebuanoness?

Jose V. Abueva had. In 1941, left for Tokyo's Shikkei Waseda University. He later became University of the Philippines president, International Labor Organization's Ernesto Pernia had gone to the Asian Development Bank, and to name-tied economists.

But ship captain Isidoro Relan sent them. So was his wife Aurea, who headed Mary Reynolds Kindergarten school. Food and agriculture Organization's economist Rolando Redondo Pezzullo and wife, Adelina, as well as engineer Raul Baronda and physician wife, Jing, sang along.

"It's the experience of women in society that bursts of the longest celebration of Christmas," Adlin Ong Jimez wrote in the Times Journal in 1978. "But not a trace of effort has been made to reanimate the beloved carol ang Pasko ay Sumapit in its native Visayan Ex Rubi."

Explained

By then, Rubi was an old impertinent widower, confined in a Cebu hospital. His cures had been hijacked by a recording company for P150. At today's post-Fernando Poe candidacy exchange rate, that's $2,697.

Cebuanos recall the frail old man would shuffle to lunch cookers at the gate, how to sing his carol right. "Ning lating" (kid) in 1950, denied "what is due him in royalties," now Manila Standard editor Ilya Bautista wrote.

This is not exploitation. Today's jargon calls that "intellectual Property Rights" theft. But our choir who ripped off the gentle musician and his lyrics' different form those who stole his new Mind of their rotorial love?

Revealing arrogance caused Rubi and Weill—and presumably other artists like them—with legal dodges.

Is this any better than gargrish who pilfer soldiers' retirement funds?

Critics say the Filipino elite converse the difference into pesos. "We live by 'pecuniary decency,'" a banker explains. "Just worth equals self-worth." As Imelda Marcos acutely learned in an interview: "Why, we practically own all of the Philippines."

Do those make a snobbery of the festival that this carol sings of? "Bayang lalaki, bayang kinabuhi," the Cebuano-original and 63 Tagalog adaptation, proclaim.

It echoes the Advent cry of Isaiah: "Break the fetters of injustice ... and break every yoke! Then, will your light break forth as the morning."

Christmas scrooge

"But I hate Christmas," wrote a reader to the influential Bangkok Post. "I can't stand Jingle Bells, Band, Bing Crosby crooning White Christmas, and the overwailing, caterwaling."

"Scrooge improved on you," came a swift response in the same paper. "We did it with our soul in Charles Dickens' novel, A Christmas Carol. Humbug!"

"Yet, you are more logical than Scrooge," the response went on. "From the ghosts of Christmases past, you identify this day with its non-material, outward symbolism. Santa's fat-ha-ha, and Christmas reading as an open fire.

"In reality, Christmas is about a Child, crucified by his mother, who went on to heal the sick, fed the hungry, showed compassion for the outcasts, predicted to outwit a tyrant (him he owned and his gave his executioners).

"He gave answers to basic questions such as pain, suffering and death, that confronts ordinary mortals like us. He was to say I was the resurrection and the Life. This is what our Christmases yet to come could be."

"Hayagan ta sa atong pagbuot ... aron sa kalipay sa maha-angkon," the Visayan version urges. "Ning with our hearts' desire will be ours."

"Ning-ay magtinabangay ..." Rubi's kind. Pinoy magkapitbisan," goes Ike Tagalog adaptation. "Let us love together / and share even after Christmas Day ends ..."

It's the same hope and it suffuses both carols.

A MIGNON of the Holy Redeemer Church on Phasee soke Lane in Bangkok. The church is owned by the Redemptorist fathers, explaining the familiar photo of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in stained glass.

Of robots and first spouses

BACOLOD EXCHANGE

Nayda R. Leonardia

THE CAPTURE of the feared bandit Ghalib Andang, better known as Commander Robot, was hailed by Negrenses as a feat best been by people in other provinces. Because he had created so much inconvenience to the province and the city while he was head of the Air Transportation Office, residents immediately remembered the case of Pandito Villaroel, who was not captured, but was virtually mowed down at the NAIA carnival venue. To them, Commander Robot was lucky he hadn't been buried down by the PNP2, say by the soldiers. Otherwise, he wouldn't be around to tell stories, and with bullet wounds in his legs only.

...

Bacolod City recently acquired some police chief, Senior Supt. Michi Arevalo, who took over from Senior Supt. George Rojales, who was assigned to the Regional Mobile Group in Valencia City. Although touted by the media and local groups for a seemingly facilitative performance, Rojales could be credited for his relentless support to the anti-drug campaign of his term. The new chief, who comes from the Directorate of Re Medicine Korea, is still being eyed solemn by residents. Being the choice of the mayor, his safety is being assessed by the rest he will play in the coming elections.

The election fever has really caught on in the province with the most interesting developments being expected in the fifth district. This is where the seat of incumbent Rep. Ayuda-ista "Yan" Lacson is being challenged by presidential brother-in-law, Ignacio "Iggy" Arroyo, the primary mover of, to farmers, maybe DOH2 knows, as does Pedal.

Another exciting area is Talisay City in the north, where businessman Ramon Lacson is expected moving toward the hall where incumbent Anthony Lizares, who had succeeded his own father as mayor, had every intention of holding on. The latest in the city was a call from the mayor for the transfer of Councilor Julius Officer Junior district for alleged partisan activities in connection the allegations, pointing out that she did not even house the personalities involved.

...

The two provinces in Negros Island, Occidental and Oriental, are jubilant for being chosen as among the 18 members of the coveted Golden Peak Awards.

The citations and club awards were handed out in Malacañang last week. Negros Oriental was added honors to Resource City Bossy and Sta. Catalina town were also declared Golden Peak awardees.

Neither Bacolod City nor any other town in Negros Occidental made it to the awards. This started a lot of depressing jokes among the award-losing residents of Bacolod. The genius of any joke has obviously started me.

A former generation, however, said there were two projects that the administration of Mayor Luis Yulo Gaisano Valdes could be proud of—Lugo Gate, and the stinky evolution tanks. That drew a lot of laughter, because Gaisano had been a very controversial installation, while the former earned the mayor a complaint before the Ombudsman. It was later elevated to a criminal case and is still pending.

The feeling Peak presentations also brought out other message developments in the city, such as the possible taking hold by the mayor for the supposed construction of a bridge in Barangay Tangling. After the much-publicized cities, it was exposed in local media that the bridge could not be built at all since the city did not own the land at the other end.

There is also the architect's plans for the supposed improved Bacolod City Hall that has perplexed taxpayers. The huge plan, displayed for months now where anybody who goes to city hall can see it, is reeling at the edges and softening already.

City hall workers say it is only for "effect," because the city has no funds to implement it. The Sangguniang Panlungsod has neither approved it nor appropriated anything for it. But of course non-of-nonsense are supposed.

...

There's a lot of excitement here over the announcement of the candidacy of Fernando Poe Jr. for president.

The turnout in strangers among former classmates of Mrs. Poe, the former Jesusa Sonora Poe, now known as Susan Roces of local movie-dom fame. Susan was a student of La Consolacion College in Bacolod where she had enrolled in stage presentations.

If '05 wins, Bacolod will have a first lady, but it is not really a novelty. First Gentleman Jesus Miguel Arroyo, husband of President Macapagal, also has his roots in Binalbagan town, Negros Occidental. Whatever of the two make it, Negrenses will still have the distinction of having a "homecourt" as first spouse.

FPJ takes stand vs globalization

From page A1

leaders happened before the forum started, other than arrival at 9:45 a.m., or 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the forum.

He, Marinay, Soto and MBP secretary general Emilio Ramos met at the PCIJ (Hotel) coffee shop for around half an hour until seven photographers arrived to take photos that appeared on the front page.

Post then received Marinay and told reporters he had another appointment at 9:30 a.m., leaving Soto to address the electoral forum.

"We just had an exchange of ideas with Ka Pareng and his other leaders," Post told the reporters on his return. He very thought the platform of photographers at his waiting HOR.

Wanted: platform

"Because Soto would be the one to discuss those issues at length," he added rather apologetically for his unwitting reckless decision to leave.

Mariano said that while Poe gave "strong signals" that he was against the country's participation in the World Trade Organization and its commitments under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, they were wanting for more concrete manifestations from the candidate given the campaign period ahead.

"We have yet to see his platform of governments. It will be up to him if he would include the issues that we gave him about the plight of farmers in light of globalization," Mariano said.

Both Ramos and Mariano said that Poe himself is not in the KMP's position against trade liberalization and the need for food security and self-sufficiency.

Nodding every now and then

"He was listening and nodding every now and then. He told me he didn't do politics anymore and he's not political," Ramos said.

Mariano said another presidential candidate, ex-Sen. Raul Roco, also went that he could see some and instead sent a copy of his platform of government, showing that he was for boosting the country's agreement with the international community on the issue of globalization.

Unity doubts

As for President Macapagal-Arroyo, Mariano said, "We didn't invite her because we already know that she is against the interests of the small farmers and fisherfolk."

Weak from another foreign trip, former President Fidel V. Ramos immediately waded into the political unrest yesterday, saying he doubted Poe's ability to unite the nation.

The obvious reason, Ramos said, is that Poe cannot even unite the main opposition party Lakas ng Tinaodo sa mang Pilipino (LDP).

"He (Poe) cannot even unite the LDP. He cannot unite two people in the LDP because they can't get their act together," Ramos quipped, referring to LDP secretary general Aquilino "Nene" Aquino and LDP president Edgardo Angara.

Poe and Lacson have been endorsed by different factions in the LDP.

Ramos also repeated his earlier statement that the country "deserved someone better" than Poe as president.

Split 4 ways

Ramos also said the support by some businessmen for the candidacy of Sen. Nikki de Castro, whom they perceive to be the only candidate capable of beating Poe in next year's elections, would be advantageous to the administration Lakas-CMD party and its standard bearer, President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"Then it will be one Lakas candidate versus an opposition split four ways. I will not explain any more the numerical advantage there," Ramos said, with a smile.

He also explained that recent surveys showing Ms Macapagal trailing Poe and Roco would not have a big effect on public opinion. Ramos explained that present surveys were mere "snapshots" of the political climate.

"What we should watch out (for) are trends not surveys," Ramos said.

Lacson's deferral

In the Senate, the standard-bearer weakened by some LDP factions said he would defer the filing of his certificate of candidacy until the same day, Jan. 11, 2004.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said he believes Poe would do the same.

Lacson's camp had earlier said that the opposition senator would file his certificate of candidacy before the Commission on Elections on Dec. 31, the first day of the filing period that ends on Jan. 11, 2004.

"I'm not going to file until we have talked," Lacson said at a news conference. "And I suppose that he (Poe) would do the same thing."

Lacson said he and Poe would deliberately meet for a second time because the camps of the popular movie actor has already announced for them to have a meeting. MBR reports from Christine Avendaño and Gloria Pupa

De Castro bid tackled in secret London meet

From page A1

was appointed by President Macapagal-Arroyo ambassador to the Court of St. James about five months ago.

He had been the chief fund raiser of former President Joseph Estrada in the 1998 presidential campaign, and of the late Speaker Ramon Mitra in the 1992 presidential campaign.

Espiritu declined to the account that a significant number of businessmen want De Castro to run because "that is the only way who can beat FPJ or Fernando Poe Jr."

Funding sources

The source said it was Espiritu who invited Arroyo to meet with him in London, among other things, the two men discussed possible funding sources for a De Castro campaign.

The business source disclosed that Arroyo and Espiritu have been "good friends" for sometime.

The source also pointed out that Arroyo was chair of the Philippine National Bank when Espiritu was its president during the Aquino administration.

Confirmations

The business source but failed to get Arroyo's answer yesterday.

But his staff members confirmed that the senator known for his fierce independence had flown to London after a brief stay in Paris.

It was learned that the senator left Manila early this week to attend the graduation of his daughter Maisa, from England's Cambridge University.

Sen. Manuel Villar, another member of the Wednesday Group, also confirmed that Arroyo was in London, but he did not elaborate.

The Kabayan for Presidential Movement yesterday said that both the administration and the opposition are afraid of De Castro for his vote-getting potential.

John Sardinaya, spokesperson of the KPM, said the administration party Lakas-CMD wants De Castro to be President Macapagal's running mate because he is more popular than the President.

"The opposition, Estrada, is afraid that the latest Pulse Asia survey that showed Poe as the leading presidential candidate didn't even include De Castro's name. It is a sign that the group is desperate to scare the independent senator from the political radar screen, according to Kalibasan.

Taiwan ties

To prove that the Wednesday Group is serious about De Castro as a presidential candidate, the business source said that two weeks ago, Arroyo and the other members of the group went to Taiwan upon the invitation of the Chen family.

The Taiwanese family has been listed several times in Fortune Magazine's list of the world's 500 richest people.

Eager to meet Kabayan

The super-rich family owns Building 101, which is currently being constructed in Taipei to rival the tallest building in the world, the Petronas Towers in Malaysia.

"The family did not hide their eagerness to personally meet De Castro, saying that he has been a consistent supporter in surveys for presidentiables," the business source said.

De Castro could not make it because of prior commitments in Manila.

The request for the senators' visit to Taiwan was renewed through top Filipino Chinese businessmen in Manila.

The meeting coincided with the trip of another Wednesday Group member, Sen. Ahmad Villar, chair of the Senate foreign relations committee.

One-China policy

Villar went to Taiwan following the decision of foreign Secretary Blas Ople on her the visit to Manila of the Taiwanese vice president and the foreign minister due to the Philippine government's One-China policy.

Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian personally received Villar in the presidential palace.

The source said the highly publicized meeting of Chen and Villar allowed the other senators to privately meet with the Lin family.

Quoting the senators, the source described the reception accorded the lawmakers as "befitting members of royalty."

'Aventajado haggling . . .

From page A1

but his wife has served a vehement denial.

Hoax

Yesterday, a relative of Wee's, speaking on condition of anonymity said: "The Malaysians were able to tape Aventajado haggling for his part of the ransom money for the Malaysian hostages."

Contacted by the Inquirer by phone, Aventajado said he knew about the tape but quickly dismissed it as a hoax hatched by Ramilon.

"It was framed by Wee's relatives," Aventajado said, referring to Ramilon. "Those who heard the tape playing did not even understand a word or sound. He is a small town nice-looking who was easily pushed by the Wees to float the tape."

Aventajado said Ramilon called him up yesterday threatening to release the tape. "I dare them to make it public so I can see them," he told the kidnapper.

Best of friends

Lawyer James Hanson said that among those present at the negotiations were Dato Anis Sammudin, former education minister of Malaysia, and Dato Teng Tiki, former chief minister of Sabah.

Hanson also expressed suspicion that Aventajado would make such an accusation against Wee. "They used to be the best of friends," he said.

The lawyer also said Aventajado failed to mention that Wee played a crucial role in the release of the Malaysian hostages.

He said even Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad thanked Wee for this in September 2000 in Kuala Lumpur.

An adviser of Wee's, who asked not to be named, said the man was "well respected" in Malaysia because "he spent a big part of his own money on them for the release of the hostages."

Hanson also said he was willing to supply details on the negotiations. "We owe the world the truth, and Aventajado is not telling the entire story," he said.

Ransom

The spokesman is planning to hopes on captured Abu Sayyaf leader Caith Sealang, widely known as Commander Robot, to establish the veracity of Aventajado's claims in his book and in interviews.

"We can be one of the sources," said lt. Col. Ernest Lucero, the Armed Forces' chief information officer, noting that the military also had in custody Sealang's lieutenant, also Commander Global, who was captured in July 2001.

"But as I said earlier, we should not accept (Aventajado's) word point-blank. We will not take his word as gospel truth. Remember this is a criminal," Lucero pointedly told reporters.

But military sources also said that Sealang still he fully recovers. He recaptured left leg was amputated last Tuesday night, and he has been diagnosed as suffering from a kidney ailment.

Shortly after his capture Sunday night in Indanan, Sulu, Sealang claimed that he had pocketed only P10 million of the P900-million ransom paid to the Muslim rebels of the Sipadan hostages.

But Lucero said that while Aventajado's claims about those who supposedly shared in the ransom payments could mitigate the charges against him, he could not escape the maximum penalty of death.

"But, there's a big possibility that the death penalty would be turned out against him for kidnapping for ransom and murder," Lucero said, noting that Aventajado's former hostages, including Filipino Roland Ullia, had expressed willingness to testify.

Operational details

In Tokyo, President Macapagal-Arroyo left it to authorities to decide whether Aventajado would be made a state witness to go after other leaders of the Abu Sayyaf.

"Those are operational details," she told reporters in an after-dinner talk Wednesday night at the Imperial Palace. "In my role as President, I talk about strategic directions; the operational details I leave to the ones that will implement policy."

But she said Aventajado would "definitely play a vital role in shedding light on a number of questions regarding the Sipadan hostage-taking."

"He and his cohorts will be brought to justice so we can let out the truth and close this bizarre chapter in our history," she said.

In a statement issued yesterday morning, the President said: "We want, and we shall pursue, justice for the Sipadan hostages just like in any kidnapping case.

"We are determined to show terrorists and criminals that such heinous crimes will not go unpunished, and that there will always be an end of the road in the hands of the criminal justice system."

Verify statements

Former President Fidel Ramos also thinks that Aventajado can verify Aventajado's claims as well as provide the government more information.

"I hope he will continue to be a source of information on the station," Ramos said at a press conference upon his arrival in Manila yesterday from China and Malaysia. "Of course whatever he says is relevant. But his statements can be verified by military intelligence."

Ramos added that during his trip, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi expressed elation over Aventajado's capture.

Terri case

Rep. Prospero Nograles urged the Anti-Money Laundering Council and other law enforcement authorities to seize the assets of Abu Sayyaf leaders, particularly Sealang.

"His shocking revelation of huge ransom payoffs should serve as a test case of our Anti-Money Laundering Law, and this is a perfect occasion for the government to show its resolve to end the Abu Sayyaf's reign of terror," he said.

Nograles, who was part of the delegation that accompanied the President to Tokyo to attend the Asean-Japan commemorative summit, said the AMLC, National Bureau of Investigation and Philippine National Police should start tracing the cash paid to the Abu Sayyaf in exchange for the freedom of its hostages.

Rep. Prospero Pichay renewed his call for Aventajado's immediate prosecution.

"He murdered and beheaded people, raped women, and threatened our economy," Pichay said in a statement. "Even local investors left the country for fear of the Abu Sayyaf, and this affected the livelihood of our people. He must now answer for all his sins." With reports from TJ Burgonio, Alexis Pajo and Cynthia S. Balance in Manila; Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. in Tokyo

Japan vows more aid after gov't peace …

From page A1

Asia Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) President Macapagal-Arroyo said yesterday.

Poverty linked to terrorism

The President said that in her bilateral talks with Koizumi, she talked about the link between poverty and terrorism. She told the Japanese leader it was important to spur investments and promote trade in the BIMP-EAGA, to prevent it from becoming the recruiting ground for terrorists.

In her statement at the closing session of the two-day Asean-Japan Commemorative Summit here, the President stated that Japan has extended financial support to the development of the Greater Mekong area, which covers Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

"We urge Japan to provide similar support to the other subregional growth areas, like the BIMP-EAGA, to maintain a secure, united and prosperous Asean community," Ms Macapagal said.

The President said the BIMP-EAGA would greatly benefit from Japanese assistance, specifically through human resource development (HRD) projects, physical infrastructure, and trade and investment software.

Visit ASEAN-JAPAN declaration signed by President Macapagal-Arroyo at the end of the Asean-Japan summit in Tokyo Friday. She is flanked by Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (right) and Bruneian Prime Minister Hibe Hyseis.
KOS PHILIPPINE PHOTO

Abdullah, too

The President also said she discussed the imminent of Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi of his government's continued participation in the country's bid to forge a peace accord with the MILF.

Ms Macapagal and Abdullah, who captured Malaysia's longtime leader Mahathir Mohammad, also held bilateral talks during a lull in the summit.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said the President expressed her appreciation to Abdullah for Malaysia's role in facilitating the resumption of the formal peace talks.

The talks are expected to resume the second week of January. Malaysia's ceasefire monitoring team is expected to arrive this month in preparation for the talks.

Bunye also said the President thanked the Malaysian official for particular development projects in Mindanao, including a palm oil plantation. A joint venture of Filipino and Malaysian businessmen, The President, Bunye said, requested Abdullah to allow the Philippines to import palm oil seeds from Malaysia in order to hasten the redevelopment of the commodity in the country.

President Fidel V. Ramos, who also met with Abdullah, said the Malaysian government was optimistic about the outcome of the peace negotiations.

In a press briefing upon his arrival from China and Malaysia, Ramos said he discussed bilateral economic issues and the peace negotiations with the Malaysian leaders.

"The Malaysian government has been very helpful to us and they are optimistic about the future and the outcome of the negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF," Ramos told reporters.

He explained that Malaysia was now the chair of the eight-nation committee representing the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the region.

Ramos also revealed that Abdullah is considering sending a Malaysian military monitoring team to the country to look at the implementation of rules governing the negotiations.

"That is a good step and a sign of goodwill from the OIC. It is to underscore the Philippine government and the MILF, specifically the Last Commands, observe the rules," Ramos said. With a report from Alexis Pepe

Defense chief trying to derail peace talks, claims MILF

COTABATO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front yesterday lashed back at Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita "for fabricating excuses aimed at sabotaging the peace process."

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said it appears that Ermita was trying to destroy the MILF's image as the international community where its claimed the rebel group was divided.

"We are still solid and united. His statement Thursday only shows that he is not sincere in talking peace with us. We believed that his statement is not the position of Malacañang," Kabalu said.

Ghazali Jaafar, MILF political affairs chief, said the issue should have been discussed with in the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities and not with the media "because it would affect the ongoing peace talks."

Conditioning

Kabalu said it was obvious that Ermita was also conditioning the minds of the people when he said the split in the MILF leaders' position on the peace talks could lead to the collapse of the process.

He said Ermita wanted the MILF Ghazali if the peace talks fail.

Ermita had alleged that a power struggle in the MILF is shaping up between the MILF's peace advocates and hardliners, particularly sub-commander Ameril Umbra Kato and Chairman Murad Ebrahim of Camp Abubakar in Maguindanao.

Running out of bullets

"We're using as an a transparent because they failed to comply with their commitments in the exploratory meetings," Kabalu said in another interview, referring to the dropping of charges against top leaders and troop pullout from a former stronghold.

"It seems Ermita is fast running out of bullets to destroy the MILF," he added.

"The problem is not with us but with the government because they have still not implemented what we have agreed before," Kabalu said.

He said the government has not pulled its troops out of the Buliok complex, contrary to the agreement reached during the March 8 exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur. Rose-May T. de Guzman and Alisah G. Hernandez, PDI labo-desma Bureau, with a report from D'Bargain

Vatican names Novo Ecijano first Fil-Am bishop in US

From page A1

Jadulco noted that there were already Vietnamese and Chinese bishops in the United States, and that Solis' appointment was made "in the spirit of a multicultural church."

He said Filipinos were "one in heart" in celebrating Solis' recognition.

He has joined six members of the bishop's family, including his sisters Cely Solis-Tapia and Helen Solis, both based in Manila.

Officials of his hometown said his appointment was fine Jesse's crowning glory.

"He brought big honor to the Philippines and Filipinos because of this singular achievement," his cousin Sister Asuncion Lucban said in San Jose.

'Compassionate shepherd'

Solis is known as a "compassionate shepherd," Fr Leonito Chevranne said in a separate phone interview.

"He serves people by working and walking with them in their journeys," Chevranne said. "He is known for doing things for the poor."

Chevranne and Jadulco met Solis' two assistants at the St. Joseph Co-Cathedral Thibodaux, of which he has been pastor since 1999.

Solis has conducted fund-raisers for the food bank in Los Angeles and for the "care of those who come knocking at the church door for financial assistance," Chevranne said.

The bishop is also involved with the establishment of the cathedral's crisis pregnancy center, which provides counseling and medical services to women considering abortion, as well as pre-natal checkups for those who cannot afford regular visits to a doctor.

Personal choice

Solis was ordained in his hometown in 1979, and served in the archdiocese of Manila and the diocese of Lithuanian in Santa Rosa.

It was his personal choice to migrate to the United States, Lucban said. "It's better for me to migrate because the priests in that country are few," she quoted him as saying then.

Solis was first assigned to the archdiocese of Beaumont and then to the diocese of Houma-Thibodaux when he came to the United States in 1984.

He served as associate pastor of the St. Joseph Co-Cathedral Thibodaux in 1986 before being transferred to Our Lady of Perpetual Savior church in Golden Meadow as pastor. He returned to the St. Joseph Co-Cathedral in 1999.

Collaborative style

Jadulco described Solis as "a good leader, a very pro-people priest, and a good administrator."

"He is well liked by people," Chevranne said, adding that Solis' leadership style was "not inhibitive for those to express his views alongside us."

Solis also served in the Diocesan Presbyteral Board, the College of Consultors, the Priests Council, the fourth Labor-the Brotherly and the Upper Lafourche Deanery.

He holds degrees in philosophy and theology, and completed studies in Oriental religions and culture for his post-graduate course.

He is the third priest from the diocese of Houma-Thibodaux to be given a leadership role in the US Catholic community.

Recent visit

Jadulco said the bishop last visited San Jose on Oct. 30 and stayed for three days. He officiated at Masses at the cathedral and at a church in Barangay Santa Ana, also in San Jose.

Solis is the fourth of seven children of Anselmo Solis, a former insurance underwriter, and Antonia Asuncion, a former public school principal. One of his brothers, Ronald, is also a priest.

He spent grade school in San Jose before entering the seminary in Tagaytay City and going on to further studies at the University of the Visayas. With a report from Anselmo Roque, PDI Central Luzon Bureau

BUSINESS

Editor Raul D. Marcelo
Assistant Editor Connie S. Mariano

Single-fare scheme for LRT scrapped

By Abigail L. Ho

(STARTING) Monday, passengers of the Light Rail Transit Line 1 (LRT-1) will have to pay P15 more to travel from one end of the railway system to the other.

The Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) is scrapping the single-fare scheme that it has been implementing since it started operations in 1984.

Under the new fare scheme, passengers will pay a minimum fare of P12 and a maximum fare of P30, unlike the 19-year-old two one-rate (but has a P12 flat rate for the whole line, except for passenger rides at any of the last four stations in either end.

For the first four stations, a passenger will be charged P12. Passengers using the single journey or one-ride only card will have to pay P15 for all succeeding stations after the first four, while those using stored value cards will lose basic (but go up by P1 increments after every four stations.

If an LRT-1 passenger, for example, gets on the train at the Monumento station in Caloocan and gets off at Buendia/EDSA station, or four stations after, he pays P12. However, he decides to get off at Baclaran station in Manila, or five stations after, he then has to pay P15.

For someone using a single journey card, getting on at the Monumento station and alighting at the Baclaran station will mean a P15 fare.

The new fare scheme likewise eliminates the P2 fare for passengers who get on the train at any of the last four stations at either end of the Monumento or Baclaran line.

LRTA planning manager Rosalino Rivera said in a presentation to the media yesterday that the new fare scheme was designed to allow the railway system to become more viable as well as give it additional cash to finance its operational as well as debt-servicing requirements.

He said the fare rationalization scheme would raise in an additional P185 million a year for the LRTA.

The LRTA last adjusted its fare in February 2000, increasing it from P10 to P12. The last big fare adjustment before that, a 50% increase implemented in September 1999, lasted all of two days as it was met by public uproar. The P10 fare then was pocketing to P15.

LRTA administrator Teodoro Cruz Jr. said the LRTA badly needed a fare adjustment as it could not address its debt-servicing requirements.

Being a government-owned and-controlled corporation (GOCC), the LRTA relied on the national treasury for its debt servicing. However, the government that was passed up on LRTA loan payments due to its ballooning budget deficit.

"For the first six months of the year, the P258 million that we had to pay [to creditors] came from our own budget," Cruz said.

He said the LRTA had to resort to a fare adjustment so it could stay afloat.

OFWs arrive from Kuwait.

Cross-cultural competence of OFWs

By Dr. Joyce Mendoza-Dy
(First of two parts)

A BIG portion of the Filipino population will continue to travel outside the country in search of work (Villegas, 2001). OFWs have the advantage over a host of professions and occupations in countries experiencing shortages of skills. This is so because of the following factors: OFWs have above-average levels of education, they are culturally adaptable or competent, they are fluent and confident in speaking the English language, they have acquired a reputation for competence and positive work attitude, and they are cheerful, resourceful and adaptable to new circumstances. These competencies have positioned OFWs to filling manpower gaps, especially in European countries suffering from depopulation such as Spain and Italy (Lisnek, 2003).

A typical OFW is fit to work in an evolving global workplace, being recognized as a valu-

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Republic of the Philippines
COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS
Manila

DEPUTATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE AND THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCLUDING THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMISSION AND THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE, OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENSURING FREE, ORDERLY, HONEST, PEACEFUL AND CREDIBLE CONDUCT OF THE MAY 10, 2004 NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS.

x---------x

RESOLUTION NO. 6424

Promulgated:
10 December 2003

RESOLUTION NO. 6424

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Constitution, the Omnibus Election Code and other election laws, the Commission on Elections may deputize law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the government, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and supervise direct supervision and control over such agencies required by law to perform duties relative to the conduct of elections;

WHEREAS, there is a need to deputize, with the concurrence of the President of the Philippines, such law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the government, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines and to prescribe their duties and functions to ensure the holding of free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible national and local elections on May 10, 2004;

WHEREAS, the conduct of the elections in a orderly and absolutely civilian process which, however, requires the assistance and cooperation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and other law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the government;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Commission on Elections, by virtue of the powers vested in it by the Constitution, the Omnibus Election Code and other related election laws, has **RESOLVED** to deputize, as it hereby deputizes the following law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the government, to perform specific duties relative to the conduct of the elections, as follows:

I. THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE AND THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Department of National Defense, its Department Secretary, and Undersecretaries and the Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Commanding General of the Philippine Army, the Flag Officer-in-Command of the Philippine Navy, the Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force, and all the officers and enlisted personnel under their respective commands are hereby deputized to ensure free, honest, orderly, peaceful and credible national and local elections on May 10, 2004.

The Secretary of National Defense shall enforce the orders and instructions of the Commission relative to the election duties and functions of the officers and members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The above-named officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and their men shall have the following duties and functions as deputies of the Commission:

1) Provide security to polling places and to members of the boards of election inspectors, personnel of the Commission and other employees of the government performing election duties;

2) Make available certain facilities, such as land, air and water craft, communication systems and other equipment, in connection with the delivery and retrieval of election documents, supplies, forms, paraphernalia and equipment;

3) Look into the existence of any armed group organized by terrorist, or which is committing or about to commit, acts of terrorism or threats to intimidate, or coerce any person to vote for or against a candidate and to suppress or prevent said acts of terrorism or threats;

4) Assist the Commission in effectively implementing election laws and/or rules and regulations, particularly the laws governing prohibitions against policemen and provincial guards acting as bodyguards or security guards, use of armored vehicles and air or water-craft, and bearing, carrying or transporting firearms and other deadly weapons in public places;

5) Conduct a periodic assessment of the peace and order conditions in critical areas and recommend measures which may be adopted by the Commission in the interest of free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible elections; and

6) Comply with and/or implement directives or resolutions which the Commission may issue or promulgate from time to time.

II. THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMISSION AND THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE

The Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, National Police Commissioner and its Commissioners, the Philippine National Police and its Director General, are hereby deputized in connection with the May 10, 2004 national and local elections, and as such, shall:

1) Effect all changes, during the election period, in the assignments of regional, district, provincial, city and station unit commanders and all PNP personnel under his command without the prior written permission of the Commission;

2) Direct the officers and enlisted personnel under his command to strictly observed the following duties and functions:

a) Provide security to polling places, the members of the boards of election inspectors and the voters whenever the need therefor arises, or whenever the Commission through its Election Officers so requires;

b) Provide security to COMELEC personnel and representatives performing duties and functions in connection with the elections whenever a request to this effect is made or when required by the Commission;

c) Take steps to protect voters from threats, intimidation, coercion, harassment or violence;

d) Enforce the following prohibited acts under Section 261 of the Omnibus Election Code:

i) Paragraph (m) on appointment or use of special policemen, special agents, confidential agents or the like;

ii) Paragraph (n) on possession of deadly weapons;

iii) Paragraph (o) on carrying of firearms outside residence or place of business;

iv) Paragraph (r) on the use of armored land vehicles, water or air craft;

v) Paragraph (s), as amended by Section 32 of Republic Act No. 7166, on wearing of uniforms and bearing of arms;

vi) Paragraph (t), as amended by Section 33 of Republic Act No. 7166, on policemen and provincial guards acting as bodyguards or security guards;

vii) Paragraph (u) on election strike forces or similar forces; and

viii) Sec. on dispensing, selling and storing of intoxicating liquor.

e) Take effective measures to prevent members of civilian vigilante units and barangay tanods from engaging in partisan political activities or any act of terrorism, intimidation, coercion, harassment, or mischief;

f) Take steps to prevent private security agencies from acting as private armies of any candidate or as campaigners for terrorists or violent acts against persons in connection with the May 10, 2004 national and local elections;

g) Implement strictly the rules and regulations promulgated by the Commission in connection, inter, municipalities and barangay which may be placed under COMELEC control;

h) Enforce specific orders of the Commission to confiscate or tear down prohibited election propaganda or advertisement;

i) Perform such other functions and duties or implement such other directives as the Commission may issue from time to time; and

j) Render periodic reports on actions taken in accordance with this deputation.

3. THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

The National Bureau of Investigation, its Director and all agents under him are also designated deputies for purposes of the May 10, 2004 national and local elections and, upon prior order of the Commission:

1) Deploy its agents to designated places in order to effectively carry out the objective of this resolution, furnishing the Commission with a list of said agents with their respective assignments;

2) Direct its agents to arrest any person who violates the provisions of the Omnibus Election Code and other pertinent election laws and the Rules and Regulations promulgated by the Commission;

3) Report from time to time to the Commission actions taken by him or his agents pursuant to this resolution; and

4) Comply with the orders and directives of the Commission which shall be given priority over orders and directives from other sources, except the Supreme Court and those issued in habeas corpus proceedings.

4. THE BUREAU OF JAIL MANAGEMENT AND PENOLOGY

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology and its Director are hereby designated deputies of the Commission to enforce the following provision of the Omnibus Election Code:

SEC. 261 (n). Illegal release of prisoners before and after election. - The Director of the Bureau of Prisons, any provincial warden, the keeper of the jail or the person or persons required by the law to keep prisoners in their custody who illegally orders or allows any prisoner detained in the national penitentiary or the provincial, city or municipal jail to leave the premises thereof sixty days before and thirty days after the election. The municipal or city warden, the provincial warden, the keeper of the jail or the person or persons required by the law to keep prisoners in their custody shall punish any person who illegally pulls out a list of the prisoners or detention prisoners under their care. Detention prisoners must be categorized as such.";

and to comply with all orders, directives and resolutions which the Commission may from time to time promulgate.

PRECEDENCE OF COMELEC ORDERS

Orders issued by the Commission in connection with the May 10, 2004 national and local elections shall take precedence over and above the orders and directives issued by any other office or agency of the government.

However, nothing contained herein shall be construed as in any manner affecting or curtailing the supervision or control over the operational powers of the President of the Philippines to conduct and direct the general peace-keeping functions of the Philippine National Police.

EFFECTIVITY

This resolution shall take effect seven (7) days following its publication in at least two (2) daily newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

DISSEMINATION

The Executive Director shall furnish all the above deputized officials and/or departments, offices, or agencies, through their respective heads, copies of this resolution.

The Education and Information Department shall disseminate this resolution for the information of the public.

SO ORDERED.

BENJAMIN S. ABALOS
Chairman

LUDOVICO S. TENGCO
Commissioner

RUFINO S.B. JAVIER
Commissioner

RALPH C. LANTION
Commissioner

MIKHEL F. SADAIN
Commissioner

RESURRECCION Z. BORRA
Commissioner

FLORENTINO A. TUAZON, JR.
Commissioner

Stocks surge . . .

From page B1

ator Equities research head Oliver Plana.

Analysts said PLDT's rise was helped by the gains in its American depositary receipts of 2.28 per cent or $0.34 to $15.24 in New York on Thursday.

The main index ended 1.74 percent or 23.71 points higher at 1,383.11. The market is up 61.61 percent this year.

In the broader market, gainers beat losers 33 to 16 and there were 34 stocks unchanged. Turnover dropped to P770.14 million from Thursday's heavy P1.07 billion. Reuters

DISCLOSURES

PCI Leasing and Finance Inc. bought 60,000 of its own shares at P1.32 each.

* * *

ELECTED directors of **Forum Pacific Inc.** were the retired Vitalio A. Pe-Benitez, William Gotardelan, Deonito Almeda, Elvira Ting, Kenneth Gaerlan, Rebecca Puno, Arthur Provincial, Leonardo Mercado Jr., Evelyn dela Rosa and Joaquin Cinches.

* * *

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission approved the merger between Asiasi Asset and **MRI Inc.** and **PNC Corp.**

* * *

Manila Mining Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on Dec. 16, 3 p.m. at Enkl SC Cypress Gardens Condominium, Makati City. Only stockholders of record as of Nov. 25 are entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting.

* * *

Music Co.'s annual stockholders' meeting on Dec. 17, 2 p.m. was changed from Dasmariñas House of Note Intercontinental to the Skytop of the same hotel.

* * *

THE BOARD of **Asian Terminals Inc.** elected Jeremy Hildreth as executive vice president and CEO effective Feb. 1, 2004. The appointments of Mark Ryles and Isaac James Pena as senior vice president for South Korea operations and vice president for marketing and commercial services, respectively, were ratified. **Compiled by Maricel P. Tuñacao, PDI Research**

CURRENCIES

December 12, 2003 Country	Unit	Peso Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.018938	1.000000	53.3150
Japan	Yen	0.000168	0.008854	0.4723
United Kingdom	Pound	1.400016	1.740000	98.8310
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.242800	0.128200	6.7100
Switzerland	Franc	0.014205	0.750000	40.0000
Canada	Dollar	0.014205	0.750000	40.0000
Singapore	Dollar	0.010737	0.566900	30.2400
Australia	Dollar	0.026415	1.394700	74.3900
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.071998	3.802000	202.8000
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.005049	0.266600	14.2200
United Arab Emirates	Dirham	0.005156	0.272200	14.5200
Kuwait	Dinar	0.062000	3.273500	174.6000
Bahrain	Dinar	0.050267	2.654200	141.5800
Thailand	Baht	0.045454	2.400000	128.0000
India	Rupee	0.000398	0.021000	1.1200
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000002	0.000078	0.0042
Brunei	Dollar	0.010737	0.566900	30.2400

ADB releases $60M for Pasig River rehab program

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE ASIAN Development Bank has released $60 million to the government representing the second and last tranche of a $100-million Pasig River rehabilitation program loan, raising significant prospects in project implementation.

Shahid Lindfield, ADB's country officer in-charge of the Pasig River Environmental Management and Rehabilitation Sector Development Program, yesterday said 15 parks have either been completed or were being developed along the river bank.

These open spaces, 10 meters wide, provide much-needed breathing space for the cramped riverside communities," Lindfield said.

"In Davao area, flows of raw sewage and waste water into the river have been considerably reduced and local governments are preparing action plans to further enhance it," he said.

The Pasig River, the main waterway flowing through Metro Manila between Laguna de Bay and Manila Bay, is of historic, social, cultural and commercial importance. However, it is heavily polluted due to indiscriminate discharge of untreated municipal and industrial wastewater and solid wastes.

The program loan, which is due for completion in 2006, is part of the $176-million integrated basin package that the ADB approved in 2000 to improve the health and living conditions for the riverside communities and to bring marine life back to the river.

The government's implementation of the policy and investment programs is having a positive impact in the Pasig River basin," Lindfield said, noting progress in meeting river conditionality and the impact of the improvements in the riverbank and their residents.

Project proponents hope that the river would be suitable for activities such as boating by 2014.

The program had a $75-million investment loan component that promotes physical improvements to optimize water quality, improve the infrastructure and canals, and prepare investment and redevelopment along the river bank. Also included was a $1-million technical assistance grant to build the capacity of involved government agencies.

The policy agenda for the river has likewise moved forward with the strengthening of several institutions for water quality monitoring and policing of wastewater discharges, a number of companies had been considered under the program, the bank said.

In addition, the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission, the new lead agency of the project, is supporting reform of water quality regulations. The bank said it believed these policy actions would have far-reaching implications, raising costs for polluting industries and requiring additional investments in solid waste and water waste handling.

9 firms investing ₱300M in Subic

By Michelle V. Ramos

TRUSTBIC, Inc. the subsidiary of Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority has signed a contract with nine companies that will infuse P300 million to put up condominiums or the Subic Bay Freeport, SBMA Chair Felicito Payumo announced yesterday.

Payumo said the nine firms were recently engaged in major facility development, hotel and commercial operations, financial therapy, health spa operations and vehicle services.

"Subic is a unique industrial zone offering multi-faceted facilities and services of world class quality complemented by the needs of investors, residents and tourists," Payumo said in a statement, adding the entry of more businesses in Subic would further boost the economic vibrancy of the area.

Global Financial and Development Inc. (GFDI), which will rehabilitate and develop the former ship repair facility in Subic to it could accommodate local and foreign luxury ships, will invest P156 million.

GFDI president Rose Bahino said the development of the seaport facility would initially require about 100 workers and was expected to house luxury ships and commercial cargo vessels going to and from various Asian countries.

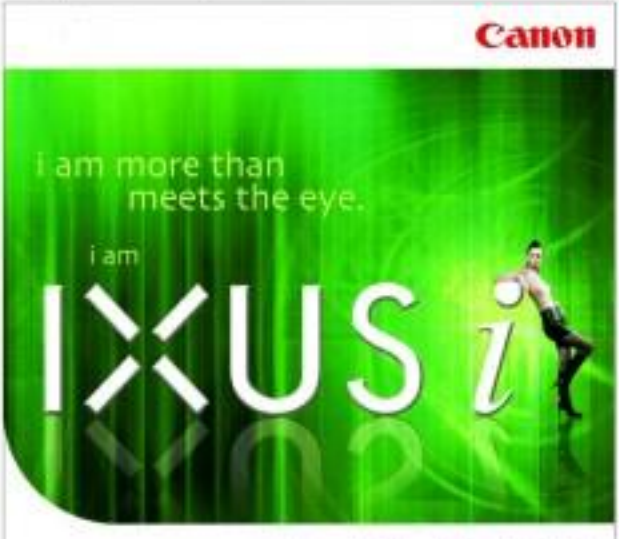
Bahino added the synergic location of Subic as well as the tourist destinations around the area, such as duty-free shops, beaches and oceanscapes, were the main factors that could attract more business to the area.

Bali Tropical Spa, which will set up a tropical resort spa at the Binictican area of Bell. and Lagoon, will invest P96 million and have about 50 workers.

Days Hotel and SBM Subic Inc., which will establish and develop buildings into five-star hotels, will invest P22 million each.

"We put our investments above the tourist spot, and we found Subic as a real destination with unbeatable diverse retail high numbers of tourist arrivals," Days Hotel president James Concepcion said.

Other firms that will operate in Subic included Starters Rock Corp., Peruvian Tek Motor Interior Corp., Ashley Boatloads Corp. and Carnes Peak Foundation Inc. Another investor type of investment will also be established in the area by major Filipino tycoons.



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Gov't to remain cautious in forging free trade pacts

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

Tokyo, Japan (12 FLET)—President Macapagal-Arroyo has assured the public that her government will only agree to close trade accompanies with Japan if it will lead to a net positive result for the country.

In a media interview on Thursday night, Ms Macapagal said: "What we have to weigh in the negotiations for an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Japan is to make sure that in the balance we gain."

That despite growing dissatisfaction among farmers on the last part of trade liberalization, the President said that the country has little choice but forge ahead with free trade agreement such as the one being crafted with Japan.

"Liberalization has to ignite and churn, side. It's there and if we don't move into this agreement with Japan all our rivals will and they will have an edge in the market," the President said. "In the end, the economy that have started in the secondary are the ones that have been left behind. We just have to make sure that we are competitive," she said that China's entry into the World Trade Organization has been beneficial to the country because it has further unveiled the country's positive trade balance with China.

The President said she would not hesitate to change gears in opening the market especially if she sees farming local industries ready to the perverse historical and tragic manner where the Philippines had successfully lobbied for a revision of the tariff schedules.

Japan has signed bi-nation governmental level negotiations on EPA with the Philippines (as well as Thailand and Malaysia) starting January with the goal of wrapping up discussion within 12 months. Three talks will not parallel with the proposed free trade area between Japan and Asean.

The Philippines is expected to demand for greater entry for its citizens to Japan which, in turn, is seeking more liberalization for its industrial and consumer durable to the country.

The Philippines is particularly interested to sending more caregivers to Japan to serve its fast-growing population of elderly.

Cross-cultural competence . . .

From page B1

able asset in worldwide economic development (Lasserd, 2003 in inbound cons).

Filipino management professionals and top executives possess deeply embedded Filipino cultural traits that have global equivalences framed on modern using our lexical approach (Church, Katigbak & Reyes, 2000).

Global personality traits

To date, culturally-based studies to determine the cross-cultural universality of certain personality traits (Big Five model) have been conducted primarily in American English and in several European languages, such as German, Hungarian, Italian, Iranian, Turkish and Czech.

Researchers have interpreted these results in the context of the Big Five Model of Personality comprising of surgency/extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability or neuroticism, and intellect/openness (Goldberg, 1990; John, 1999 in Church et al, 2000).

Church, Katigbak and Reyes' study on the generality of some Filipino indigenous traits appears to be the world's study conducted outside of the US and Europe that was based on a comprehensive taxonomy of personality trait adjectives (Church et al, 1998).

Their study showed that Filipino trait dimensions of gregariousness, concern for others vs egotism, conscientiousness, self-assurance and intellect overlap with and have significant correlations to the Big Five Personality dimensions. The research has shown global equivalences of certain Filipino traits, which in turn, may possibly explain the cross-cultural competencies of OFWs in addition to their stringent adaptability to improve their socio-economic status.

In an earlier study, Reyes (1997) showed that personality types made from other popularly known factors (e.g. upbringing or family atmosphere, family career aspirations, educational background, training and experience) influence a person's management style as well as success in assignments. On a deeper level, researches on the relationship between personality and basic function hypothesis that personality traits are a function of the quadrants of the brain that is dominantly used (Herrmann, 1998).

Big Five Global Personality Scales	Filipino Personality Equivalent
Extroversion	Gregariousness —Sociable, cheerful, group-love and playful as opposed to shy and serious. Self-assurance—Strong-willed, brave, resolute and decisive
Agreeableness	Concern for others versus egotism— refers to oriented compassionate, humane and strong, kind and gentle as opposed to selfish, egotistical and domineering
Conscientiousness	Conscientiousness—dependable, responsible, organized and hardworking. Self-assurance—determination and persistence
Emotional stability	Temperamental versus—moody, ill-tempered as in labile
Intellect or openness to experience	Intelligent, cultured and talented

Management trend

Studies proved that Filipino possess cultural personality traits that have global equivalence (Church, Katigbak and Reyes, 1998). These traits form part of a broad of management that Filipino managers can use to their advantage. In fact, studies have shown that there are certain Filipino work values that can propel employees to higher levels of performance in the midst of crises as well as in facilitating organizational change. These Filipino work values are kapuwa (identity), kapwa-pakikipag (pakikisama) and kapwa-loyalty (Church, 1997). These trait values are predicted to underlie corporate productivity and excellence in the Philippine workplace (Jocano, 2000).

Kapwa-pa refers to a sense of "belongingness" in a group that involves classifying of the sense of individuals and defining the need for a strong sense of one identity to a group.

Kapwa-loyalty refers to the experience of identifying with the company's products and services that have led to a sense of "pride" or a sense of "belongingness" to a point that ultimately enhances confidence in the company. If employees are proud of the company, they would have the urge to do something to help it.

All these lead to the experience of the work value kapwa or reminiscence, which is, refers to a series of concerns and faith in the experience that could be transformed into the experience of molecular transferred or "feeling the pain or troubles together as a group." The spirit of kapwa encourages the belief in sacrifices of striving for excellence while confidently assuring that "tough times do not last but tough people do." (Jocano, 1997). Consensual sense is the impetus for teamwork, discipline and responsibility.

Decision-making system

Coupled with the Filipino work values mentioned earlier, Filipino managers have a multi-tiered way of information gathering and decision-making in responding to business issues. The traditional communication style is composed of three types, namely: pangungusap (competitive), pakikipag-ugnayan (personal), and pagkakaunawa (consensus). This would ultimately let the work team to experience pagkapwa-tao understanding (Jocano, 1998).

Pagkakaunawa occurs when every person in the group is encouraged to be actively involved in participating or by the creation of the business issue under consideration. The manager acts as facilitator to then able to establish an intuitive feel of the business situation. Most Filipino managers prefer this as it unifies because it makes them feel part of the bigger group. It also makes them feel respected by their knowledge shared and flexibility with the problem situation (Jocano, 1998).

Pagkakaisa, which involves modeling certain techniques desired to produce business outcomes, is also practiced during coaching sessions. During these sessions, the facilitator needs to be skilled in creating a conducive atmosphere that will create appropriate feelings that appeal to the values, emotions, and emotions of group members (Jocano, 1998).

Pagkakaunawa, which literally means to agree to go along with the judgment of the group after considering other alternatives, is the highest level of consensus and means the group is ready to act on some plans they have initially formulated and have finally owned and recommended to perform (Gonzales, 1987 & Jocano, 1998).

In summary, the above values based studies have shown that Filipino indigenous traits of personal closeness may strongly account for the migratory competence and global adaptability of OFWs whose salary contributes to the Philippines as the highest source of foreign exchange.

(To be continued)

(The author is the deputy program director of the Master of Science in Management in the University of Asia and the Pacific School of Management (UAP SOM). The article is an excerpt of her paper also awarded at the 2003 Leadership Workshop for HR Professionals at the Technical University of Valenzuela—as Outstanding Paper for HR Professionals) at the above undertaking honors that contributes to the global adaptability and cultural competency of OFWs).

SAYRE Lim and Angela Limpoco, chair and president of the Philippine Franchise Association (PFA), respectively, receive the 11th Kalakbay Awards from Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon in a ceremony held at the Philippine International Convention Center. The PFA won the Kalakbay Award - Event of the Year (Exhibition) for Franchise Asia 2003 which was held at the World Trade Center in September 2003.

ABS-CBN to settle ₱1.9B in maturing debt next year

By Dodo C. Dantao

ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp., which has benefitted from robust advertising spending this year, is set to retire P1.9 billion worth of maturing debts next year.

The move would reduce the company's debt level to about P4 billion.

ABS-CBN chief finance officer Randolph Ricbelle told reporters Thursday night that the broadcasting giant was fully hedged against debts falling due next year. This was despite the decision of its planned $150-million global bond offer.

As of mid-September this year, the company's debt stood at about P6 billion, which is expected to go down to P5.6 billion by the end of the year.

Ricbelle also said that despite the deferral of the global bond float, the company could still finance maturing debts as well as capital expenditure using internally generated cash.

"The bond float was simply intended to broaden our sources of funding," Ricbelle said.

The company has indefinitely deferred its $150-million global bond float to avoid paying higher risk premium amidst recent unfavorable domestic events, which created jitters among investors.

Portion of the offering's proceeds was intended for use by ABS-CBN as its contribution to the equity call of Beyond Cable, the nascent broadband company of the Lopez Holdings Group.

For next year, the company plans to spend about P1.3 billion for its capital outlays, including the acquisition of film rights.

ABS-CBN's cash reserve stood at P1.6 billion as of mid-September.

Analysts agreed that with the company's upcoming income of about P5.8 billion, it could finance its capital expenditures and maturing debt next year without resorting to additional borrowing.

For the first nine months of the year, ABS-CBN reported a net profit of P805.6 million.

For the third quarter alone, the net income surged by 23 percent to P301.9 million from a year ago. The company's solid performance was attributed to the continued recovery of advertising spending, the steady expansion of international revenue and the controlled and managed growth of operating expenses.

Consolidated net revenue for the nine-month period reached P9.67 billion, up by 24 percent from last year. Airtime and other broadcast related revenue expanded by 20 percent to P8.48 billion, primarily due to the growth in advertising volumes.

Operating expenses grew at a slower pace of 17 percent to P7.79 billion. The growth in operating expenses was due to the progressively changes implemented in the fourth quarter of 2002 and the start-up expenses associated with ABS-CBN Europe.

Security Bank notes get healthy rating

INTERNATIONAL rating agency Fitch Ratings has assigned Security Bank Corp.'s P2.0 billion worth of the 2 cents a "BB-" rating reflecting the bank's bonds by financial capabilities.

The London-based agency has also assigned the bank's long-term foreign and local currency ratings a "BB" rating indicating a stable outlook that is at par with sovereign ratings.

Security Bank is among the country's 10 biggest banks in terms of total assets, deposits, loans and capital.

The bank presented a 9.79-percent return on equity as of June this year, pushing its ranks to No. 5 among the top 16 private domestic commercial banks in the country.

The bank has a non-performing loan ratio of 12.7 percent, lower than the industry average of 15.1 percent by BSP, count, at 90 percent, is also better than the industry average of 86.6 percent.

Security Bank is eyeing over P3.5 billion in tier 2 capital to improve earnings and place it in a position where it can expand its businesses.

Thrift banks' bad loans level going down

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE BAD loans of the country's more than 100 thrift banks improved to 12.71 percent of their total loan portfolio as of September, from 12.82 percent in the previous month, data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas showed.

The thrift banks' non-performing loans rose by 1.1 percent to P19.62 billion. Their total loans grew by 2 percent to P154.40 billion. During the same period, the ratio of RPLs to total loans of commercial banks also slid to 14.49 percent, from 14.93 percent in August.

The bad loans of MBs are accounts whose principal or interest remained unpaid for at least 90 complete days. A year ago, the bad loans ratio of the smaller banks stood at 13.04 percent.

The thrift banks have cautious and hard-nosing process of collateral backing delinquent loans. The thrift banks' level of real and other properties owned or acquired went up by 19.06 million to P26.73 billion.

The NPL coverage ratio of thrift banks also improved in September to 38.09 percent from 36.25 percent or best loss reserves grew by 2.3 percent to P7.59 billion, even as the level of bad loans also increased.

The coverage ratio tells whether banks have enough reserves to cover defaults. A higher coverage ratio indicates a more prudent banking strategy.

The coverage ratio for commercial banks also went up to 19.79 percent from 19.61 percent in August.

Benjamin Diaz, secretary-auditor, they are still worried that banks have not been taking full advantage of the Special Purpose Vehicle Act to reduce their bad loans and foreclosed assets.

The SPV law that provides tax incentives to RPL take-outs will expire after April 2005.

As of the third quarter, 12 out of 41 commercial banks posted NPL ratios above the industry average. Most notable were that of Philippine National Bank at 30 percent of total loans, Prudential Bank at 38.26 percent, Philippine Bank of Communications at 28.28 percent and Bank of Commerce at 27.68 percent.

RP plans to import 945,000 MT of rice

THE COUNTRY is planning to import up to 945,000 tons of rice next year by traders-mostly, officials said on Friday.

A government panel that sets the amount of rice imports each year recommended 600,000 tons be bought by state trader National Food Authority (NFA) and 345,000 tons by private firms and farmers' groups, a government statement on Friday quotes.

Earlier yesterday, Agriculture Secretary Luis Lorenzo told a news conference that he had approved the importation by the NFA of 600,000 tons of rice for next year's buffer stocks.

The NFA was not waiting for the go-ahead from President Gloria Arroyo to launch tenders, he said, adding that the rice should be delivered as soon as possible before the country's elections in May.

"It may have to come sometime soon because we understand historically that (during) election time, there is a higher purchase of food products," Lorenzo said.

Some politicians distribute rice and other food products during campaign rallies to woo voters in rural areas.

Private firms and farmers' groups may also be allowed to bring in rice from overseas as long as they pay the tariffs, Lorenzo said.

"We will have to see locally the possibility of allowing by-interest imports," he said.

This year, the government allowed private firms and farmers' groups to bring in 120,000 tons of the country's total imports of 934,000 tons as part of efforts to dismantle the NFA's monopoly on rice imports.

The NFA brought in 540,000 tons this year, with another 112,000 tons given by the US government and 37,000 tons as traded by Washington under a commodity loan. Reuters

New registration system for imported vehicles OKd

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE GOVERNMENT and the local automotive industry have signed a memorandum of agreement addressing the problems that cause delays in the registration of imported vehicles by the Land Transportation Office.

The representatives and government agencies that signed the MOA included the LTO, the Bureau of Customs, the Traffic Management Group, the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. and the Truck Manufacturers Association.

The agreement will be done in about five days, from several months, the process of registering imported new vehicles with the LTO.

Under the existing system, the process of registering an imported vehicle calls for the submission of the official copy of the certificate of payment from the Bureau of Customs.

The MOA provides that the official copy from the Customs is no longer necessary and that the importer's copy of the certificate of payment of duties and taxes is an acceptable document for imported vehicle registration.

Also, the MOA states that registered copies of the certificate of payment will be sent by the BOC to the LTO within five working days.

Hector Macanan, secretary general of Compi, said the allowed five-to-ten-day delay period for the submission of the certificate of registration to the LTO indicated a significant improvement from the present system which takes several months.

The MOA covers the registration of automobiles and trucks registered in completely knocked down or completely built up units by participants of the government's Motor Vehicle Development Program, which is administered by the Board of Investments.

The trade body Compi and TMA regularly monitor concerned government agencies of the list of duly registered MVDP participants.

Compi and TMA said in a joint statement that the MOA would stimulate, if not totally eliminate, the number of motor vehicles that become stolen.

"It will also provide a good relief to investors buying of assembled vehicles because it will lessen their waiting time for the registration of their vehicles," said the two groups.

SATURDAY Snipet

Jingle Jangling!

Tim Yap

DASHING through the shows, **Martin Nievera**, star of innumerable Gift Giver campaigns, comes rushing into the white-washed Swatch store hallway that doubled up as Japanese lunch venue to launch female Suzuki Grand Vitara, **Virgie Ramos** from 6 years this Yuletide season.

Everyone at the long table is wearing white, majority and pristine, as the background Christmas music provide a warm, fuzzy feeling. Marshmallows and candy canes, M&Ms and cookies dominate the lush table—later occupied by Gilbey Lopez, Shiva Sesame and Monty Morcoff.

Hilton Edgington-Jaworski leads Christ mas wishes with the guests, as Irene Pilotin-Velder, host and hide-around-cute her outfit, tries to outshine the guest white Christmas tree. With the dozens of prizes that follow her every segment, she deserves the human Christmas tree prize!

It is an intimate gathering of 20 or so select clientele—artists, supermodels, television and movie stars—all Gen Suzuki expect to partake of the Christmas spirit.

Each one gets to wear a Swatch, as Irene gives away prizes for oldest Swatch, most Swatch, and other on-the-spot categories that only the Sex Princess can think of. The best prize comes from Tito Virgie. When she doesn't sit low, workers upon the planet's core, or is covered (poop) on boys Pringle glass sculp-

(PAGE 2)

WHY DON'T YOU GIFT SATE ON CHRISTMAS DAY? Virgie Ramos-Suzuki King &

MODEL BELLES. Tommy de Leon-Gonzales and Angelic Alberto-Sadhwani

STAMINA-P STYLE. Boys Pinsonpell and Celso Lopez

PEPATO pic!

TERMO TAYO! Swatch girl Mikee Cojuangco-Jaworski and Boy Zobel, Jr.

CHRISTMAS IN CALIFORNIA. Ramos-Sadhwani Diego and with Martin Nievera

Jingle Jangling!

Mikee Cojuangco-Jaworski trades Christmas wishes with the guests, as Tessa Prieto-Valdes, bows and balls sewed onto her outfit, tries to outshine the giant, white Christmas tree

JINGLE TATTLE. Aiston Sun Singer, her daughter

CHINA TOWN. Chloe

MERRY MEMORIES. Mikee Jaworski, Susan Roces

RATED A MAS. Rachel Alejandro

MR. BIG. Miguel Ramos

"BOOK for, please!" Says Gloria Rueda

DAWN WE HONOUR DAY APPAREL. Dawn Zulueta and Gloria Fonacier

TIME FOR'S SWITCHIN GOOD TIME. Virgie Ramos plays Santa

TINSEL TERRIS. Ben Tulfo, JJ and Maricris Sioson

DESIGN/DECOR. Susan and Nit Calpo

CHRISTMAS TREAT. Rose Santos under the tree

AIN'T YOU BABE!

TWELVE DAYS of Christmas—edited version

JASPER BELLES. Monique Wilson and Sandy Rumsuelos

TWO KINGS OF THE ORIENT. Mauricio Arevalo and Peppy Rodriguez

MERRY MERTens collects Christmas cards. Celso Lagmi

HEAT YOU AT THE HEAT. Ma-nila has some big things in store

DESIGNER GENES. Miles Macapagal

IMMACULATE IN WHITE. Mia Borromeo

JOYCE Ch... the world

SILENT NIGHT. Anna Bartolomeo

"Dreams are at once fruit and outcry against atrophy of the senses"
-Jim Morrison

Sweetened dreams

MONEE's dream, as envisioned by Yoshitaka Amano

OUT THE WINDOW

Tala Diaz against an atrophy of the senses

CARE for sensitive dreams!

At the bewildered of my bed lamps one of my most precious treasures in life: an authentic April 1986 Dreamcatcher.

It is a beautiful, delicate thing—feathers and colored beads hang loosely on strips of old leather, attached to a ring encircling a webbed pattern. I found it ages ago in an obscure little shop amidst the red sands and bloodstained peaks of Arizona in Arizona. The shop-owner (grizzled, hatchback Native American pathetic stereotype) told me that if you hang it over a baby's crib, it will "catch all the bad dreams and let the good ones pass through." Being a wide-eyed little dreamer myself, I was enthralled at the idea of a mystical object that could protect me from nightmares. I hung it over my bed and it remained there for more than 15 years.

Imagine my surprise, when, more than a decade later, I moved—seeing my possessions packed into the cardboard coffins that would soon be my temporary tombs—I found the dreamcatcher dangling from the rearview mirror of my mother's car. Perhaps she had been overcome with guilt after years of stealing my stuffed animals and refusing to let me have a pet hamster

WOMAN OF THE FUTURE

Photos by PAOLO PINEDA
Makeup by MARUYASU UCHIDA
Chief makeup artist Sha Abrazos
Hair by LOURD RAMOS
of Exquisite Salon

Alex Escat is like a cocktail with swirling colors that make a tequila sunrise look pale, monochromatic, and boring

By Stephanie Zaldivar
Contributor

IT IS no belief that people could be described like beverages. There are those who are like tequila—deep, masculine and strong. There are some that are virginal and pure, non-alcoholic and bland, non-interesting.

Alex Escat is definitely none sort of a contrast. The kind of cocktail that is an accurate description, with an intriguing blend of exotic fruits and an 18-year-old blend of modern urban fusion. She's the cocktail with swirling colors that make a tequila sunrise look pale and boringly monochromatic. You see, Alex has been my best friend for the past few years, so if there's anyone I know inside and out, it's she.

Alex may not be coming on full force now, but just wait a few months and she'll be too hard not like it... curious? She'll get you deliciously intoxicated, and then leave you with an incurable hangover.

Her beautiful Eurasian face has graced countless ads and billboards. Her first one for in the very beginning of Smart Telecom's aggressive ad campaign, then as the Pond's model when luscious skin everybody wanted to touch. Apart from that, she's a regular in Manila's catwalk scene. One might say she is the embodiment of the new millennium's modern woman.

The charisma

Most nearly single and loving it, she has become a pop icon for Filipina society because she's broken the Elaine Clara mold with the biggest and most stylish single-mother story. She's known for her independence that stems from her intelligence, strong will and passion for life. Three qualities, unfortunately, are not synonymous with Filipinas in general. But I pride, our rising consumer society is embracing the idea of the Independent Woman. Over time, Filipinas have become shampoo, bottles and more bronzed. Alex is one of the pioneers.

The Cosmo Alexandra (as I like to call her) proves that women have the right to live life freely and explore all aspects of it. That is why I say she's a rock. Girl. She's not just one thing, but many things! She loves the martini-swirling scene as much as seeing forests, rainforests, with me in the boonies. She's a career-loving bohemian and fashion exs, European and Asian at once, serious and playful—plus, she speaks four languages and learning Japanese! But what really sets her apart and places her as iconic fight is the fact that she likes being in charge of her life, paying for her drinks and being single, and yet she still believes in true love. She said I have watched innumerable old movies together, sighing in unison when that scene has about up comes on. Alex, underneath the first that there is a time and place for everything in life, and that is what makes her so complete.

Alex is the cocktail that is out to shake the world and leave its mark. Her latest shoot pushes cosmopolitanism and fashion envelope but to the extreme, the kind that becomes a classic. Her beauty goes far beyond her face and goes right from the spirit of the wonder of the future that she embodies. It has the bold color, distinct flavor and overnight that keep you asking for more.

The sweetest fling with Marco Lobregat @ JUANSOY

PERFECT TASTE. 'Bangus Sisig'

HEALTHY JUNK FOOD. Eggplant-sarise

STEVE'S Beef Ribs. Sinful...satisfying.

SHRIMP-MAZE. "Lovepang Salad"

FOOD for the gods! Bean soup

LUNDIS my religion, dating younger men

It used to be looked down upon—it was once considered taboo for women. But if Demi Moore, Cameron Diaz and even Pope Benedict can do it, I want in too. Let's all join the club!

The boy

I was 18 and a college freshman at La Salle when I first met Marco Lobregat. We were a unit but constant pair, always disturbing me and my Modernism as we tried to watch an edited pornporn. Coke, as I knew him then, was the twelve-year-old kid brother of my classmate Louie. We would do our work in their tito's house because it was near school. Almost everyday, Joel Cruz would be smoking pot around, answering his inner like street paragon siblings loud locks.

When Bernhard first captured yours, after, Luis Espiritu, who used to run a top-notch fling agency, spotted Marco and whispered to me that he was one of the upcoming hotties. I realized that Marco was Coke. The little boy I used to know was all grown up and looking mighty fine.

But it was one thing to look and another thing to touch.

That was just against my religion. Even dating someone my age was out—and, until I get older and younger men just seem more appealing!

The place

Located on a strip of food malls and not-so-stars in Greenbelt 1, Juansoy is the star of the show. Newly opened after moving from its previous location near the cinemas, in the old food hall, Juansoy stands out and automatically catches attention with its eminent identity. When you're inside, you almost forget that you're inside a mall. Bright orange and Mexican-painted walls and/or our art installations. There's a fiberglass and resin naked man on all fours and another one suspended from the ceiling. Most tables have legs that are actually lighted legs of a person. Eric Barrier, owner of Juansoy, described the dining experience at his restaurant as "casual Pinoy dining inside out. "It's funky and it's eccentric but in good taste. The food tastes even better.

The date

We started with the eggplant caviar, smoked or grilled eggplant, without the skin. The usual garnishes—tomatoes, cucumber relish and ginger—balance the flavors evenly. Their version comes with crackers, nachos and sour cream. It's like eating healthy junk food.

I love it when people take a chance on unconventional ways of combining ingredients. Coke and I enjoyed the beef soup the most. This recipe is supposedly a monsterless secret. What monster, please?

It was my first time to try beef in soup. Usually, when beef is cooked, it is done very thoroughly. It becomes of the likeliness of the alcohol. But in this recipe, you can see distinctly taste the beef. This soup is one of a kind! Coke even knew that it was pale pillars and not light because the tall boiled liver was present. Mixing the beef with the broth, mushrooms and a very light dairy product lifts the heaviness of the soup.

My top two things on the menu are the lemongrass baked barramundi without the scampis, vegetables mixed and eventually accumulate when removed over time and the. It was topped with sweet kaong-coconut like French fries that complemented the dish. I was so content with the flavors that I didn't even need the sauce. It was the same thing with the mango-sago—the sweet mango need not very tangy ang. I would say this dish suits perfectly for Pinoy palate.

Struggling to make conversation while coughing a total of eight dishes, and a never ending amount of delicious homemade cocktail iced tea.

It's so hard to keep your price while eating at specified dits. But they were excellent! There was one left over the plates, which I call the boys place. Coke is the city type when it comes to girls he likes. But with food, he voluntarily took the last piece with no hesitations.

He admitted to preferring more mature women

TOO many legs. Taken at Juansoy

TINA TASTES

by Tina Pamintuan

DON'T CALL me. I'll call you on MyGhim

no especially because he's always been around older people in general. Or was he just saying that for my benefit?

I had to ask him to comment on this matter.

1. "They usually know what they want."
2. "They can teach and I can learn it."
3. "The challenge."
4. "Of course a) women over girls any day"
5. "Less games are played."
6. "They are mentally/financially more independent and are not needy."
7. "They usually have their own lives, are more independent and are not needy."
8. "The level of communication is usually higher and the sense of more lesser, sense."
9. "Go down-ego out of the question."
10. "Women are wonderful to be with."

Pinoy bonbon confessions

We ended our meal with confessions and Pinoy bonbon. Bonbon is a basic version of bonpon. The dessert version is pieces of fruit or cake covered with chocolate for dipping. They also take it with bread and melted cheese. In Juansoy, slices of local Pinoy fruits like papaya, mangos, bananas and pineapple are used instead of apples. They are served with hot melted chocolate, perfectly proportioned to mini pulpsicle over fire.

I confessed. But I once stole a 99-year-old (just don't ask me when). I should be proud to be on a date as Coke, who is 22.

Other people would kill to be in my shoes. Hell, one of Cosmo's 99 most eligible bachelors. He also has a portfolio of commercial endorsements—Globe, Colgate, Coke, Nivea, Gen Yzer Hon Smith Textile, Mendiscapes and MTV.

Juansoy is a great casual dim place, especially when you're not sure if it's a date or not. The atmosphere is very cozy, lively and unpretentious.

The people behind the place get the intricate role to not just giving customers original eating and delicious food that will share your wallet. They have also created an atmosphere for stories with a very amicable staff and customers and that you usually have to pay more for.

What: Juansoy
Where: Ground floor, Greenbelt 1
When: everyday 7 a.m. - 10 p.m.
How much: P200-250/head
Contact: (02) 894-4966

Questions, comments and suggestions: tina_bati@yahoo.com

Return of the Pinoy super hero!

EDU Manzano as Captain Barbell

By Lito Cayetano
Correspondent

THE PINOY superhero is making a comeback. In the next few weeks, we will be seeing living breths as "Captain Barbell" Vhong Navarro as "Gagamboka" and Vic Sotto as "Fantastic Man." The three films will be competing alongside seven multi-round Filipino epic dramas for a share of the daily audiences.

How will the movie-going public react to the re-introduction of superheroes to Philippine cinema? And how will these three films (and the genre) fare? Will they look themselves, as Hollywood does, to producers design and special effects, or will they incorporate more traditional Filipino elements of story telling, subject matter and aspirations?

And like their foreign counterparts, we expect that "Gagamboka", "Captain Barbell" and "Fantastic Man" will make money. From the previews and posters that have been released, it all so looks like all three films were made with the highest-quality special effects—by Pinoy standards. No doubt this is to improve upon our decayed and Hollywood-second movie-going public that we're up to the challenge.

Guarantee

These Pinoy superhero films may indeed succeed in making money and being entertaining, but will they be able to evoke a feeling and produce impact on Pinoy viewers and society? Will they be able to show us something more profound than box office success?

In the United States, superhero films are guaranteed blockbusters. Yet the genres and success of this unorthodox genre rests on the mark it makes on contemporary pop culture. Superman has always stood for both physical strength and strength of character. Batman has always been the penniless millionaire avenger. The Incredibles represent those who were judged, belittled and shaped by a society that rejected mutants. There are superheroes for all kinds of problems. But Hollywood and the Philippines don't be looking for two different kinds of heroes.

Superheroes are symbols of hope and strength, but unlike the problems that can accompany these heroes have enemies that can be seen, felt and conquered. In their world, evil is embodied by a three-looking villain, one, silly one that is sly and seductive. The thrill and satisfaction of the Hollywood film lies in the assurance that the problems can, and will, be resolved by the story's end. The heroes will always be victorious and the conflict will always be issued out. What we need in the Philippines are Pinoy heroes who can make us believe that there are answers to our own problems.

Ideally, the eventual Metro Manila Film Festival should be not only a box-office contest but a venue for ideas. This year there will be several themes that will discuss different issues.

IT'S A crunch. Vic Sotto Lordkeeper

EVERY guy has one. Dang Nardo as another Captain Barbell

DING, explains! Nanette Medved as Darna

FROM Superbooks to superhero of the movies

GOOD example Sc. Norbert Bautista as Commander Barring

The genre has the potential to lead us to a deeper understanding of social, cultural, even political problems.

CAN this Pantha's record defeat the evil that is piracy?

SATURDAY Special

Fan-tabulous!

Sure, the holidays get really lonely when you're not in your own country. But if there's one upside to being far from home, it's celeb sightings. Twenty-five-year-old Christie Tan wrote from New York to share her encounters with Hollywood stars. We have only one thing to say: We're green with envy.

ON Broadway with Hugh Jackman outside his show "Urban Cowboy"

WITH Ricky Martin

Hi...Rupert.

Hope things are life on projected.

I got to meet Tom Cruise! How cool is that? I've had a crush on him since I saw Top Gun when I was eight! I have a 17-year old-nauseous "role-reversal" with him!

I went to the premiere of his new film, "The Last Samurai." My cousin Nick Warner scored some tickets. I went to the after-party too, where I met more stars. Wish you were there. It was just your kinda thing. I am sooo gonna sling your wives with pictures of celebs. Ha-ha-ha!

You was really sure. I told him I was from the Philippines and he said he'd been there to shoot "Rain on the Prairie of *Lolo*" and that they stayed in Tagaytay. I told him that his example and he grimaced, inspired me and that he was my favorite actor. I stopped myself before I started raving about his work (I've seen all his movies and was enumerate them in the order of the year that were released) or telling him how amazing he looked. He complimented me on my dress. What he didn't know was that I was freezing cuz/because his sheer fabric of the flimsy, sexy number. It was 40-degrees out. Hehehe!

Write me back and tell me all about what you've been up to.

Hugs,

Christie

CHRISTIE Tan (2nd from left) at the premiere of "The Last Samurai"

WITH Hayden Panettiere

WITH Tony Goldwyn

WITH Shaquille O'Neal

Do you have celeb sightings you want to brag about? Drop us a line and we'll run the pictures, too! E-mail us at super@inquirer.com.ph.

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